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SHORT STORIES

No. 752.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending May 30th, 1903.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

PROLOGUE.

The Wedding.

"THOSE whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." The sacred words were droned in monotonous tones of long usage by the lean, apathetic curate, who but dimly observed the faces of the man and woman before him, whose lives he was knitting together irrevocably and for all time, until the grave should give up her dead.

They were but one of the many hundreds of couples that took the vows of marriage upon them under his guidance, and except that the face of the bride was one of strange loveliness and youth, they were in no way different from those others who had gone before.

The church was empty of all save the principals in the marriage ceremony, and the responses of the loud-voiced verger sent a hoarse whisper reverberating round the sacred edifice.

The dull grey fog of late October had crept insidiously up the aisle, and enveloped the four figures in a misty haze; the slim left hand of the bride, with the shining gold of a new wedding-ring on the third finger, alone was the attraction of a solitary shaft of timorous light that fell slantingly from a side window.

The ceremony was over. In the vestry the newly-married couple signed the register with icy fingers, the verger being the only witness present, who added his name after theirs.

There were no congratulations to receive; no bevy of joyous bridesmaids for the proud groom to salute; no confetti-throwing or sweet-voiced choristers to sing "The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden." The bridegroom tipped the obsequious verger, then as silently as they had entered the church they left it—man and wife—"for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer."

"Sweetheart," he murmured, looking down at the white, lovely face of the girl he had made his own, "look up at me—smile into my eyes. This is our wedding-day!"

She raised the heavy, blue-veined lids, and revealed a pair of eyes of the deepest violet found in the heart of a pansy; eyes so perfect that they might be excused if human hearts were wrecked to gain a smile from them.

"I am cold and miserable!" she answered, with a swift smile that acted as a solace to her words. "Let us get away from this horrid fog, Vernon; it has struck a chill into my very heart. I can smile in the sunshine, but gloom makes me wretched."

"Hush, darling!" he whispered. "Don't let us leave the church where we have knelt and taken marriage vows upon us with words of regret! In the darkest shadows my love for you would warm me, and keep hope in my heart."

She nestled up to him prettily, as he wrapped her tenderly round with a rug. He then kissed the proud, vivid mouth of his bride, Margaret Grant, who, an hour ago, was Margaret Heath, orphan, dependent upon the charity of an old maiden aunt. They had met but a month ago, and now this girl, beautiful as the first young buds of Spring, was his wife, to keep and cherish till death did them part.

"Cheer up, little wife!" he said; "life is going to be a long dream of happiness for us both. Something to look back to when the clouds come; our little bark will weather the storm together!"

"We must never have storms and gloom, Vernon," she exclaimed. "I want the sunshine and roses of life, not the gloom and the thorns. Poverty and sickness I could not bear. Promise me that you will keep them from me?"

She leant her exquisite face on his shoulder, and, gazing into so much beauty, he could make no other answer than the one he did. His arm tightened around her slender waist:

"Beloved! All my efforts will be to keep your feet in the sunny way; but you know," he went on, half-seriously, half-playfully, "Fate is the artist who paints the clouds in the canvas of our happiness. But *you* love me so dearly that even the things you *hate* would not influence that love!" he cried passionately. "Were I a pauper you would not change?"

She moved her head restlessly.

"Of course not, Vernon, dear," she smiled sweetly. "I love you very much—you know I do. But don't ask me

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horrid questions about paupers!" she pouted. "How can I tell what I would do in circumstances impossible to occur?"

He smiled, then sighed. How could he, a grave, struggling journalist of thirty, expect his child-wife to understand the real significance of the marriage service? She was so young—only seventeen.

"A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded."

His position was almost assured, and he had money saved up for a rainy day. Besides, there was Digby—dear old Digby Scarlett, his friend and collaborator in their first novel. He had Digby to fall back upon in the hour of need. He looked at his wife. What was she thinking about? he wondered.

"A penny for your thoughts, darling," he said abruptly.

She laughed—a pretty, girlish laugh.

"They are worth more than that, Vernon! They were about money—oh, heaps of it!" She clasped her hands impulsively. "I was looking forward to the beautiful things I would buy with it! The places I would see, and the people I would conquer with it! Oh, Vernon, I am so glad you are a rich man!"

Excitement had lent a sparkle to her eyes, and a pink flush to her pale cheeks. Rarely before had he seen her look so lovely, and he vowed never to let her know he was not a rich man. He would work hard, and make the money she already imagined he had. To see the look of disillusion in those pansy-like eyes would spell death to him.

That evening, after they had crossed the Channel, and were sitting in a private room in a Parisian hotel, Vernon Grant put a velvet case in his young bride's hand.

"A wedding jewel for my matchless one!" he said tenderly. She took it with an exclamation of surprise.

"Oh, Vernon! Another present? How lovely! What is it?"

He smiled, elated like a schoolboy at her pleasure.

"Your birthday is also our wedding-day, darling, October the thirtieth; so I have given you a trinket that represents the jewel of the month you were born—an opal ring."

"An opal, Vernon!" she said, with a sudden shiver. "Oh, how unlucky! Opals are stones of ill-omen! I almost wish you had chosen some other kind."

She put the case down with a petulant gesture, then, seeing his look of disappointment, said quickly:

"I will try and get rid of my superstition, as you did not know! See, Vernon! I will wear it now, in defiance of all precedent!" She slipped it on her finger, and laughed in his face. "*We* can afford to scoff at omens!"

After dinner Margaret opened the long windows and stepped on to the balcony. There was no fog; just a clear sky, and a luminous moon lent a silver haze to the streets, and threw shadows into unexpected places. Vernon Grant followed his wife.

"See, beloved!" he whispered, bending his face to touch the burnished hair on his shoulder, "there is the twin-sister to our 'honeymoon'!"

The Honeymoon.

DIGBY SCARLETT turned over his letters leisurely in the interim between breakfast and sorting a cigar.

In appearance he was not bad-looking, being tall and well-built, with sleek hair and gleaming teeth that showed on rare occasions in a smile that mocked, or jeered, but never caressed.

A student of the human face may have noticed that his eyes were set too closely into his aquiline nose, and had also contracted a habit of not looking straight at his interlocutor, but rather obliquely, or through half-closed li[ds].

The lips, though well shaped and red, were spoilt by a perpetual sneer, while on the upper one there was a faint, bluish mark, either the relic of some fighting contest, or a birth-mark, but it added to the sinister expression of his face.

He fingered his letters thoughtfully.

"U—mph! They don't look very important. Duns, bills, and a few invitations! Ah! There's one from my friend and collaborator, the valiant Vernon! I wonder what the Paris post-mark means? Anyway it can wait. I will first do what has taken me so long to make up my mind about, ask adorable Margaret Heath to be my wife.

"I did not know the little witch had taken such a hold on me! I, Digby Scarlett, am honestly in love with a child, and one as intangible as a sunbeam! She seemed to like me when Grant and I stayed with her aunt, but I don't fancy Love has found a place in her vocabulary—yet."

He lighted his cigar, then sat down at his desk, and in a few brief sentences signed his name to the first offer of marriage he had made in thirty years of life. With a half-sneer at his own weakness, he addressed and sealed the letter, then lit the cigar that had gone out.

"There! Now I'll give a few seconds to Vernon." He opened the letter carelessly, and for a time there was no sound in the room save the ticking of an ormolu clock on the mantel, and the purr of a placid cat on the hearthrug.

Digby Scarlett rose slowly; his face was a shade paler than usual, which perhaps made the blue mark on his lip look more strikingly apparent. He kicked the cat from the hearthrug, then smiled grimly when the animal returned and rubbed itself against his leg.

"Is that a prophetic sign, puss, that the people I kick will come back to my feet? I fancy it is. I fancy it will be so one day."

He looked at himself in the glass, and his hand went up to the blur on his lip. He frowned thoughtfully, stroking it with gentle fingers.

"Twice hit by the same hand," he murmured; "and both blows destined to die with me—to bleed internally! Not bad for a man intellectually my inferior! But the third blow *I* shall get in. My innings begins to-day. He laughs best who laughs last!"

He wrote a few letters, lit another cigar, then pulled a Bradshaw towards him.

"I'll look up the trains now."

As he opened the book, a piece of paper fluttered from between the leaves. "Ah! a note of some sort," he muttered, looking at it curiously. Then, as he looked, his face changed colour, and a curious light came into his eyes.

"By Jove! Fate is dealing me trumps this time. A bigger deal than I hoped to play!"

It was a piece of paper—blank, save for the signature of "Digby Scarlett," but not quite in the hand usually signed by that gentleman, though perilously near to be mistaken at first sight for the genuine thing.

He remembered the occasion very well. He and Vernon Grant had been, some few weeks ago, trying to outvie with the other in copying their respective signatures, with the result that Digby Scarlett had made a very poor show, and Vernon Grant had surpassed even the signature of the man he had imitated.

"Why," he had laughed to his friend, "with a little practice I should turn out a very good disciple of 'Jim the Penman'!"

"With a little practice!" Digby Scarlett murmured, putting the piece of paper in his pocket. "I fancy I can oblige my friend in his desire for fame!"

* * * * *

"Well, old man, it is a real treat to see you again. We were thinking of leaving Paris after three weeks of gaiety. Margaret is actually longing for England! Have you seen her?"

Digby Scarlett nodded his head.

"Yes, we met on the staircase, you lucky Benedict! I congratulate you! She hardly remembered me, though," he laughed; "you appear to have ousted all memories from her mind."

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"I love her deeply," replied Vernon Grant simply. "I hope, Digby," he went on, "you don't think it was mean of me springing this on you so suddenly? It has been like a whirlwind—our engagement of a few days, and then our marriage."

Digby Scarlett raised his hand and touched the mark on his lip. It was a habit of his when thinking deeply.

"Of course not. By the way, you remember the bet we had about imitating each other's signature?" he began abruptly.

"Yes," laughed the other lightly. "What of it?"

"Only this. I had another bet the other day with a chap. He was struck with the similarity, but laid me a hundred pounds that I could not get a bank to take it. I said they would notice nothing; and I want you to help me win the bet."

Vernon Grant laughed.

"What! And compound a felony? Do you mean you want me to present a cheque from *you* at *your* bank, signed by myself as *you?*"

"Yes. I'll trust you not to stick to the money, though," Digby Scarlett retorted with a grin. "I only want to see if it's possible to do it. And Lacy will pay me the hundred on my word, and a letter from you."

"I'm afraid my hand is not in good form," said the other thoughtfully. "Besides, it's risky; the bank may not regard it as a joke!"

"Nonsense, I'll stand by you and explain!" Scarlett interrupted quickly. The blood in his veins was throbbing like the propellers of an engine, and the scar on his lip felt like a burn.

"Look, practice on this piece of paper, then I'll give you the cheque when your hand has regained its cunning!"

He pushed a pen into Grant's unwilling fingers. And for a few seconds the younger man wrote quickly the name of "Digby Scarlett."

"There!" he laughed, entering into the spirit of the game, for him—though he knew it not—a game of Death; "now hand over the cheque, and I'll bet that you will win your hundred pounds the moment we land in England."

He quickly wrote the signature of his friend at the foot of the cheque, filling in his own name as the person to whom the money was to be paid, and then paused.

"How much is the joke to cost?"

"Oh, fill it in for five thousand," said the other carelessly, "I know I can trust you!"

"Rather!"

Then Vernon Grant rose from the table and slipped the cheque into his pocket as Margaret entered the room.

Three days later they landed in England.

"Cash that to-morrow, Vernon, early," said Scarlett in a low tone, as he parted from them; "and wire me when you leave the bank. Oh, by the way, here's your coat; I think I took it in mistake!"

He moved away, and as he settled back in his hansom he laughed softly; "My visit to Paris was not wasted. I fancy this scores one to me!"

In the Trap.

It was dinner time, and Vernon Grant and his lovely girl-bride were preparing for a happy evening together at the theatre. As they rose from the table two men were shown into the room.

"Vernon Grant?" said one interrogatively, while his companion edged towards the door.

Vernon Grant gazed from one to the other.

"That is my name," he said haughtily; "but I don't understand the meaning of this visit."

"You will shortly," replied the man grimly. "I have here a warrant for your arrest on a charge of forgery."

"Forgery?" A short laugh burst from Vernon Grant's lips. "I can easily explain matters if it is about the cheque I presented yesterday. My friend, Mr. Scarlett, will make it clear at once."

"I have nothing to do with that," replied the representative of the law, gruffly. "And I must warn you that anything you say now will be used in evidence against you. We have a cab outside," he went on, "you had better say 'Good-bye' to your lady, then come."

For a moment it dawned upon him that matters were serious. Then he thought of the laugh he and Scarlett would have at the law's expense when all was explained.

He turned to his wife. She had uttered no cry during the interview, but he noticed that her delicate young beauty had aged as though a sudden blight had fallen upon it.

"It's all right, darling," he said tenderly. "I shall return to-night and tell you all that has happened."

She shrank from him quickly, and in the violet eyes she flashed upon him lay the shadow of an awakened hate.

"Don't touch me; don't speak to me; only go!" she panted; and, bitterly wounded in his love, Vernon Grant, after one last yearning look at his bride, left the room with the men who waited for him.

* * * * * *

The doom had gone forth! After a long trial, in which the evidence of his friend, Digby Scarlett, had only served to tighten the coil of Fate round his neck, Vernon Grant left the dock with stumbling feet and dazed senses, while ringing in his ears was the echo of the judge's sentence: "Fifteen years' penal servitude!"

Everything had gone against him, and the very fact that in his overcoat was the piece of paper on which were the few attempts to master his friend's name, had strengthened conviction. Then the money was found on him; and his plea that it was to serve his friend to win a bet was put aside as barefaced and insolent.

He had listened eagerly for Digby Scarlett to defend him, and when that gentleman, gently and sorrowfully, had declared all ignorance concerning their compact, and had confessed to carelessness regarding his care of his cheque-book, Vernon Grant, in the bitterness of his soul, began to understand the moving of the waters beneath the ripples—his friend had betrayed him, like Judas of old! But there was his poor young bride. In *her* lay his hope of living down the years before him, and avenging vengeance!

Permission had been obtained for an interview with Margaret, the last, for how long? She had been in court that day, for he had caught a glimpse of her red-gold hair under the thick veil as he stood in the dock.

The turning of a grating key in the heavy lock of his cell-door made him flush, and catch his breath. It was his wife, come to say "Good-bye!"

The door was partially closed, and they were alone.

"Margaret! My darling! God forgive me for dragging your young life into such an atmosphere!" he said, in a broken voice. "But you will wait for me, dearest, won't you? The years will fly by, and we shall be together again; and I shall then seek out my enemy, and kill him!"

"I have come to say 'Good-bye,'" said the clear, cold voice of the girl, drawing away from his outstretched hand. "Not for so many years, but for ever! You have spoilt one month of my life," she went on passionately, "but I mean to live the *years* for myself.

"I don't pity you—I hate you! Shame and disgrace are my wedding portion from you, and I never wish to see your face again! I have already destroyed your wedding-ring—see!" and she held out her left hand, slim and ringless. "That opal was an omen, after all! Good-bye!"

He bowed his head dully.

"You are justified in what you say, but I think you might have been kinder. I have suffered too. But you may go, and I promise to annoy you in no way. But, Margaret," he cried despairingly, "kiss me 'good-bye'; in the name

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of womanhood have some mercy on me—your husband. Remember your vows—'for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer.'"

"I remember only that you are a felon, and that I am your wife," she retorted bitterly; then, with a slight gesture, she slipped past his outstretched arms into the corridor beyond, and the convict flung himself down on the plank bed and burst into the tears that saved his reason."

FIRST CHAPTER.

Two Birthdays.

IT was late autumn, and Nature had donned her livery of old-gold and tinted browns, while in the air there lingered that faint, indefinable suggestion of regret and mourning—regret for the death of Summer, and mourning for the birth of Winter.

The trees reluctantly cast their garments from them—the last remnants of their yearly trousseaux—and watched them circle lightly to the ground, where they fluttered crisply among their mates of yesterday. The sun, a crimson disc of fire, shone valiantly in a sky of grey, while a young thrush lifted up its voice in a song heralding winter.

Muriel Maitland raised her head and inhaled a long breath. She herself might have been a young wood-nymph, for from her toque of pheasants' wings to the dainty tan shoes on her feet she embraced all the many hues of autumn; and in a buttonhole of her brown coat was a leaf of golden red, while in her hand was a bunch of the same foliage. She rustled her feet through the drift of leaves lying thick on the ground, then turned reluctantly towards the Manor.

"I love to be out on a morning like this," she sighed. "These dear old acres of wood and field lying round the Manor are a source of undying pleasure to me! But I must go in now, or I shall be late."

She slowly crossed the lawn, opened the long French window, and stepped into the dining-room of Maitland Manor.

By the fireplace a boy was standing, gazing moodily into the glowing grate. He had a pale, aristocratic face, clear cut like that of a cameo, and a tangle of warm brown hair swept over his wide brow. His eyes were dark, and had blue rings round them, and his mouth had the discontented droop commonly seen in a delicate, spoilt child.

"Hallo, Woolf!" said Muriel, going towards him quickly, and drawing him to her, "what are you dreaming about?"

"I was not dreaming," the boy replied slowly. "I was remembering something that happened last night when I was in bed."

Muriel laughed. She was very fond of her old-fashioned little step-brother, and his quaint mannerisms always amused her.

"Tell me what it was."

"Someone came into my room," he said gravely; "and at first I was frightened and shut my eyes tight. Then a sound like a kiss fell on my pillow, and a voice seemed to wail, 'All these years and no sign; God grant I may keep him!' Then there was silence in the room," the boy went on gravely, "and when I opened my eyes it was just the same as usual, only violets seemed to be near me—like mother's scent, you know."

"That was a funny dream," said Muriel absently.

She remembered that she had not seen her step-mother that morning, and she took up the great cluster of autumn foliage and moved towards the door.

Outside the boudoir she paused, then tapped lightly at the door.

"May I come in?"

A low voice answered her, and Muriel was in the presence of her step-mother.

In a deep, luxurious chair, drawn up close to a roaring fire, a woman was sitting. Her face was that of a girl in her early twenties, round and dimpled; her red-gold hair was elaborately dressed, and in the deep-set eyes there was a gleam of something that haunted—apart from the beauty of them. The scarlet lips, revealing dazzling white teeth, were classic in their severe lines of beauty.

She looked up swiftly when Muriel entered.

"Dear, you bring a breath of wholesome winter into this heated room. I thought it was my boy!"

The girl laughed. "No, 'Mother o' Pearl,' it is not Woolf; only your natal comrade. See, here are some of your favourite leaves. A tiny gift, but acceptable, eh, Mother o' Pearl?"

She knelt down by the chair and stroked her step-mother's slim white hand. She had a great reverence for her father's lovely wife, and her girlish admiration was graciously acknowledged on her ladyship's part by an occasional lapse into sisterly converse.

"How young you look, 'Mother o' Pearl!'" she laughed. "I am eighteen to-day, and you are——" she stopped abruptly. There was something about Lady Maitland's manner that forbade a familiarity.

"While I am nearly twice that dreadful age!" her step-mother smiled sweetly. "Thirty-five, child; quite a comfortable, placid person."

Muriel laughed merrily. "I only hope I shall have the same aspect of comfort and placidity at your age, Mother o' Pearl! It is most becoming!" Then, with a sudden shy boldness, she said:

"You must have made a lovely widow before you married father! I can just imagine you in those black, clinging robes of mourning. Was—was *he* your first love?"

A strange expression flitted across the perfect face of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife, and the classic lips tightened suddenly into an ugly contortion. The kneeling girl did not see it, but she felt the hand she was holding tremble.

"How cold you are, Mother o' Pearl!" she said solicitously, lingering playfully on the pet name she had bestowed upon her father's wife. "Did you have a good night? Woolf had a dream about someone kissing his pillow. Perhaps you walked in your sleep!" she laughed.

Lady Maitland rose quickly, the long lace on her sleeve pulling a china vase off its pedestal, whence it fell with a loud crash into the fender. She started, and pushed her step-daughter from her with an irritable gesture.

"Dear, excuse me," she said apologetically. "But my nerves are all wrong to-day. Now you must hurry away; I have a lot to do before lunch, and your father wants to see me in the library. I have my present to receive," and with a brilliant smile she gently closed the door upon the girl.

Once alone, Lady Maitland stood thoughtfully gazing out of the window at the wooded expanse of scenery beyond. It was her habit to rarely appear among her family until the lunch gong sounded.

Domestic details did not trouble her, being in the capable hands of the housekeeper, Mrs. Janes, and Lady Maitland was too wise a woman of the world to wish to wrest the keys of authority from those who had held them before her advent. So she was consequently beloved and popular with everyone in Maitland Manor from the highest to the lowest, with the exception of—her elder step-daughter Agnes, who had held aloof from her since they had met fifteen years ago.

But it was not of Agnes that Lady Maitland was thinking. She had long since ignored her existence, after that first feverish desire to win the love of every creature with whom she came in contact.

"It is strange," she murmured; "the child is too open to have a secret motive in the background. But coming as her questions did on *this* day of all days they almost seemed like a foreshadowing of trouble. Perhaps I am overstrained and imaginative," she half laughed; "and after all what is there to fear? Absolutely nothing! The dead past has indeed buried its past only too well. And I have my boy—my Woolf—to live for; all the old links are dead."

She opened a tiny escritoire that was in one of the windows, and drew out from a secret drawer a paper, yellow and time-worn. What was written on it appeared to give her a sense of satisfaction, for she folded it up and replaced it with a smile

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on her proud mouth; then went downstairs to her husband's study.

* * * * * * *

Sir Trevor Maitland was a typical hunting squire, big, bluff, hale, and hearty; twice the age of his second wife, whom he regarded with almost adoring reverence, for her beauty had the effect of making him feel that he was in the presence of something he could not understand; that into the window of his life had been placed a sheet of stained glass, and the face of the saint looking down on him was that of his wife, Pearl.

"Well," she said brightly, settling herself gracefully into a low leather chair, "what is my present this time, Trevor? Am I to guess?"

Her husband touched her soft cheek tenderly.

"Darling wife! This is the fifteenth birthday of yours we have spent together, and I swear that you don't look a day older than on the first! It's I, the old crock, that has travelled down the road; you seem to have stopped at the first milestone!"

She laughed lightly. "Ah, Trevor, children are we women's milestones! I ceased to grow old when Woolf came. Then I went backwards and became a child again. But come, show me your gift; I am impatient."

"My dear," her husband began somewhat hesitatingly, "my gift to you this year is one that will surprise and, I hope, please you as well. I have given you jewels of every description on previous birthdays; but this time I propose giving you a jewel of another sort—a human jewel, my dear, that will grow dearer to us with each year. Can't you guess?"

Lady Maitland shook her head slowly; she was puzzled as to her husband's meaning.

"I am not good at guessing, Trevor. You had better tell me."

"It is this. It is fourteen years now since that child, 'Ivy Strange,' was found outside the Manor gates, and we have grown so fond of her that I propose legally adopting her—making her one of ourselves in fact."

He looked at his wife for a response, but her face was averted and he could only see her regular profile.

"Does my gift please you, sweetheart?"

She laughed disdainfully. "Well, I can hardly say it does, Trevor. I am not particularly fond of stray children. It is one thing to show them charity, but another to knit them to us irrevocably. The girl is very happy at the lodge, they are kind to her, and she is always up at the Manor, and makes a nice companion for Muriel.

"But," she went on impressively, "it would be a wrong to the girl to take her out of her station and put her among people socially her superior. Besides, why another daughter in the family? Surely you owe something to your own girls, Agnes and Muriel, to say nothing of your elder son, the heir, and—and——" her voice softened, "*our* son, Woolf?"

Sir Trevor Maitland shook his head. Like all rather weak natures he was obstinate where he made up his mind.

"You are not correct, my darling, in supposing that by adopting a child I should be wronging any of my other children. They are all well provided for under the will of their mother—my first wife. But I hoped you would welcome a daughter!" he finished, in a disappointed tone. "This is the first time you have ever refused a gift of mine, Pearl!"

"Forgive me, Trevor!" and one of her white hands rested on his shoulder with a caressing gesture. "It was just a little sudden, this proposal of yours. Personally, I desire no other child but Woolf; he is the pivot round which my life revolves. It is hardly to be wondered at that I should not hail with such delight the advent of another claim on your heart and purse! But I will think it over, dear," she added quickly, seeing a cloud on her husband's face. "Perhaps you are right and I am wrong!"

"That's it," said the Squire. "Now I have some news for you. It concerns Agnes."

"Agnes?" queried his wife curiously. "In what way?"

"Heriot North, the son of my old friend, Jim North, has written saying he has just returned from India, where he has been some years, and hints that he hopes he will have the pleasure of seeing Agnes, whom he remembered as a child; also, that if she is free, he wishes for my consent to pay his addresses to her."

Lady Maitland smiled. Agnes was just five years her junior, and looked at least as many years her senior. She wondered what manner of man he was who wished to make Agnes Maitland his wife. But Maitland Manor could spare her very well.

"That will be very nice—for Agnes," she said drily. "Have you seen her, or will you let the lover acquaint her with his intentions?"

Sir Trevor hesitated. "Well, my darling, I thought that you, a woman, would understand better how to put that sort of thing than myself. You see, I might make a mess of it, while you have so much tact."

Pearl Maitland laughed. "Very well, flatterer, I will go now, and you may trust me to find out in what direction Agnes' sentiments lie. When do you expect this Mr. North?"

"To dinner to-night," replied her husband. "I hope you will succeed, darling."

Outside the library door Lady Maitland stopped, and gripped the banister with one white hand. Her cream and pink skin had faded strangely, and her lips trembled.

"It shall not be!" she muttered. "I will see no beggar brat sharing my son's fortune. I wish I had insisted on the girl going to the workhouse when she was first found! Woolf has been cheated of becoming the heir because of his step-brother, but he shall not also be cheated of his money! I must get the girl out of the way; but how?"

SECOND CHAPTER.

A Link with the Past.

Agnes Maitland looked at herself in the glass. She was dressing, not only for dinner but for life—for the long-deferred right to take her place among the women that are helpmeets and mothers of men. She was just thirty; an age when an unmarried woman is neither flesh, fowl, nor good red herring! And now Heriot North, the man she had worshipped as a child, desired to make her his wife.

She could hardly believe it at first, when her cold, beautiful stepmother had suggested that she should wear the prettiest robe she had, and arrange her pale, sandy hair in the style most becoming, for at dinner that night she was the object of attraction to Mr. North! So she had chosen a blue silk dress, and loosened the scanty knot of hair at her neck, while the strands of untidy fringe had been curled!

She could not change the narrow, grey eyes, with their white lashes, nor reduce the flaming scarlet of her neck and arms to the satin creaminess of her stepmother's, but in a subdued light she would easily pass for five-and-twenty, and gratified vanity had softened the expression of her face.

"That will do, Mason," she said to the patient maid, who was adding little touches to her dress, "you can go."

The woman lingered. She had recently arrived at Maitland Manor, and was a sour-visaged but excellent menial.

"Excuse me, miss. May I make so bold as to ask you something?"

"Well," said Miss Maitland, "what is it, Mason?"

"Only this, miss," continued the monotonous voice. "In the box-room this morning, when I was emptying those old travelling trunks of the rubbish in them, I found something that I thought I ought to ask you about."

Sir Trevor Maitland's elder daughter raised her pale red brows and surveyed the expressionless face of her maid in the mirror. But she failed to read it.

"What was it?" she said shortly.

"A book?"

"No, miss; only a pair of baby's socks and a little flannel vest," the woman answered. "I was throwing away a bundle of paper and they fell out."

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"It is certainly odd, but nothing out of the way, Mason. There have been many nurses at Maitland Manor since those boxes were stored."

The woman shook her head.

"Excuse me, miss; those socks and vest were not of the kind worn by Master Woolf; they were common like."

Agnes shrugged her shoulders; the woman's persistence amused her.

"I am not interested in the subject, Mason; you had better throw them away, or give them to some child."

The maid tightened her lips. But she obeyed her orders sullenly, and finished her duties before leaving the room.

When the door had closed on her, she drew from her pocket something small and flimsy, and looked at it with a grim smile.

"She may not be interested," she muttered, with a jerk of her head in the direction of the room, "but I am, and I am not going to drop it. I mean to find out who it is that marked this vest with a 'G' and left it in her ladyship's box."

When Agnes went downstairs the drawing-room was empty save for Lady Maitland, and a pang of sharp envy shot through the girl as she saw the radiant, queen-like beauty of her step-mother. She was clad in white tulle, while in her shining hair and corsage there nestled lilies of the valley.

"She might be a bride of seventeen!" Agnes thought spitefully, her thin mouth growing hard; but she concealed her thoughts under a burst of insipid girlishness.

"Are none of the others down yet?" she said, seating herself on a couch facing a long mirror in which she could see who entered the room without being seen herself.

Lady Maitland smiled. She knew what was passing in her step-daughter's mind. "Muriel has been down, but went to see Woolf in the schoolroom, and as for Jack——" She shrugged her shoulders. "I have seen nothing of him all day. Probably you know more than I do."

Agnes sneered. "You mean Ivy Strange does! I meant to tell you to-day that I think someone ought to speak to father. His foundling will cost him more than he reckons one day!"

"My dear Agnes," laughed Lady Maitland, teasingly, "I never interfere unless personally annoyed. And I am not sure that the pretty waif your father has brought up with Muriel would not make a very charming Lady John Maitland in the future!"

Agnes started to her feet. "It seems to me," she said, bitterly, "that the male portion of the family has developed a passion for dragging 'nobodies' into it!"

A faint pink stained the pale face of her father's second wife, and the delicate nostrils dilated with some inner emotion. But Lady Maitland smiled sweetly upon her step-daughter.

"Perhaps you are right, Agnes, though," she added calmly, "the female portion of the family has been unfortunate in securing 'nobody' to drag them out of it."

At that moment the door opened, and Sir Trevor came in, accompanied by a tall, dark man with an eager, strenuous face, and a well-shaped, nervous mouth.

"Here is Agnes with my wife," Sir Trevor said heartily, waving his hand vaguely in the direction of the two women.

"My dearest," he turned to his wife, "this is Heriot North; my wife."

But the visitor had already stepped up to Lady Maitland, and taken her hand in his.

Agnes

"Agnes!" he exclaimed, "is *this* you? I never fancied you would grow up *such* a woman!"

A low laugh of amusement came from the lips of Sir Trevor's wife.

"I am sorry my white frock caused you to think I was your old friend, Mr. North. *This* is Agnes; *I* am Lady Maitland."

For an instant the man was at a loss to grasp the full meaning of the error he had made; then, quickly pulling himself together, he turned with a laugh of embarrassment to Sir Trevor and Agnes. The baronet was frowning with importance, but the face of his daughter had gone haggard and pinched.

"I always laughed when doctors warned me not to try my sight," Heriot North said easily, taking Agnes' cold, clammy hand in his, and gazing with a kindly glance into her old-young face; "but after my ridiculous mistake in not recognising you, Agnes, I shall have to take to glasses at once."

She laughed harshly. The newly-aroused feelings of tender womanhood, that had lain dormant in her until that day, died suddenly of strangled hope, and from that deathbed of hope there rose up a great, bitter hatred for her step-mother; for in the eyes of Heriot North, when he looked at Lady Maitland, she had read the words that were meant for herself. Her father's wife had robbed her of her birthright!

At dinner, where Heriot renewed his friendship with Muriel and Jack Maitland—the latter tall and fair, with laughing blue eyes and crisp, curling hair, and an infectious laugh—the conversation chanced to touch the profession of the guest.

"How do you like being on an Indian paper?" said Sir Trevor. "Harder work than an English one?"

Heriot North laughed. "Not so hard, but more interesting!" he said. "But it is eighteen years since I worked for an English paper, and then I was just beginning."

"What was it?" said Jack Maitland. "'Leaders' or 'turn overs'?"

"Nothing so classy," laughed the other. "I was a police court reporter, if you know what that means."

"You must have seen a great deal of the 'seamy side'?" Lady Maitland smiled.

"Yes, I did," he replied gravely, turning to her with a sudden flash in his sombre eyes. "I shall never forget reporting a case of forgery once."

Sir Trevor's beautiful wife smiled again. She had a rare smile of peculiar sweetness, that flickered in her eyes first, and gradually curved her haughty mouth, and sent dimples to dwell in her rounded cheeks.

"Was it very interesting?"

"Very! And the circumstances were peculiar too. The prisoner's friend prosecuted him. They had been collaborators together in a novel, so far as I can remember; friends since boyhood. The prisoner vowed he was innocent, and that his friend had asked him to present the cheque at his bank, as he had a bet with another man about it not being possible. Of course the defence was fearfully weak, and he got fifteen years' penal servitude."

Lady Maitland fastened a bracelet that had slipped from its catch. She was still smiling, but her delicate nostrils quivered slightly and the colour in her cheeks was a trifle paler.

"Was he a married man?" asked Agnes.

"Yes; on his honeymoon!" replied North, slowly. "I felt awfully sorry for the chap myself. I saw his wife on the day he was sentenced. She was coming out of the cell; been to say 'Good-bye,' to him, I suppose."

"What was she like?" asked Lady Maitland, slowly raising her head and looking into his eyes.

He hesitated. "It's eighteen years ago," he laughed, "rather difficult to remember. But one thing I never forgot, and that was the wonderful colour of her hair—a mixture of copper and brown; but by this time it is probably grey, or the poor soul is dead."

Lady Maitland uttered a stifled cry that turned all eyes on her.

"The—heat," she faltered; then suddenly Heriot North sprang to his feet in time to catch her in his arms.

Sir Trevor Maitland's wife had fainted.

THIRD CHAPTER.

The Child of Chance.

"If you love me, then our marriage is a foregone conclusion, and you must reconcile yourself to the idea of one day being 'Mrs. Jack Maitland.'"

The girl so addressed, with all a lover's dear authority, was

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Sir Trevor Maitland's *protégée*, Ivy Strange, who, fourteen years ago, was found half buried under the ivy of the lodge walls, and the man who wooed her so confidently was Jack Maitland, the son and heir of that benevolent gentleman.

They had met in the wood, their usual place of rondezvous, and the old, old tale, so new and thrilling when heard the first time, had been poured into the delicate, shell-like ears of the girl who, but seventeen years of age, and a waif, held herself with as much grace and dignity as did the proud, haughty lady of the Manor herself.

She smiled wistfully into the ardent face of the man she loved, and for whom she felt her love ought not to be; but to know that he had told her that he wanted her to one day become his wife was a joy fraught with pain.

"Yes," she said gently, "I do love you. I seem to have loved you since I was a baby under the ivy long ago, and was roused from my strange resting-place by being picked up in your arms and taken up to the Manor."

"Then that proves that your love is my right," he said eagerly, trying to gaze into the violet eyes under their sweeping lashes, "for had I not been beating up the leaves with a stick you might never have been found, darling! I was even your god-father," he laughed, "for it was I who christened you 'Ivy Strange,' and thought it such a good name! And now," he continued tenderly, "like that 'ivy' you have twined yourself round my heart, and I cannot live without you! You have admitted your love for me; then why should you refuse mine?"

"Because," she said, turning tear-dimmed eyes upon him, "I must remember that there is a gaping chasm between us that can never be bridged over. You are the son and heir of Sir Trevor. I am the child of chance, brought up by the charity of your father! How can I repay him by such ingratitude as permitting his son to marry me!"

"But, darling," continued her lover passionately, "why do you make a difficulty of that? Anyone has only to look at you to see that you are a lady from the crown of your chestnut head to the soles of your tiny feet. And were your birth to be discovered, I know it would be unimpeachable. But I want you as you are, sweetheart—my little 'Ivy Strange'!"

"Ah," the girl breathed sadly, "that's it. I have no name but the dear one you bestowed upon me as a waif! No, Jack, however much it breaks my heart to say it, I must refuse to marry you until I know who I really am, and that seems impossible to find out after all these years!"

He took her hands and drew her towards him. He was only twenty-five, and she was his first love, whom he had always loved, and intended one day, when she was older, to win for his wife.

"Will you promise," he said slowly, "that no other man shall ever have your love, and that the only obstacle to becoming my wife is the uncertainty of your birth?"

She lifted up her eyes, and in their true, clear depths he knew there could be no double dealing. She was incapable of deceit, and coquetry was a word she but vaguely knew of.

"I promise," she said, a delicate colour staining her fair skin, "that I shall only love *you* all my life, and no one else, and that the mystery of my birth is the only barrier that prevents my becoming your—wife."

Slowly he bent his head, and their lips met in a lovers' kiss.

"That is a barrier that shall not exist much longer," he said decidedly, when she had disengaged herself somewhat shyly from his arms. "Let me see, you were a child of about three when I found you, darling. It ought not to be difficult to trace."

The girl clutched her lover's arm with eager fingers. "Oh, Jack, find me my mother! I want her! To feel a mother's protecting arms round me when in pain or trouble. Sometimes I envy Woolf; he is the apple of Lady Maitland's eye, and when I see them together it makes me want my own—my *very own* mother!"

Jack Maitland's honest blue eyes grew misty, but he put a protecting arm round the trembling girl, and said cheerfully,

"If she is alive, my darling, I promise to find her for you. I shall leave no stone unturned to win my wife!"[1]

"Ah!" she cried earnestly, "she is alive; I feel sure something would tell me if she were not. I would understand in some mysterious way were she dead to me!"

"Darling, I will find her, dead or alive. Then she will put your white hand in mine and say, 'Jack Maitland, take your wife!'"

"But first," she whispered gently, "you will say, 'Mother, take your child!'" Then, with a sudden, shy gesture, she raised her face to his.

"Kiss me, Jack, and when you find *her* tell her I have all the love of seventeen years saved up for her!"

"And what about me?" he said half jealously.

She blushed. "All the love of my life is yours from now and for ever! Now I must go back," she said, after a pause, in which they had gazed into each other's eyes; "come with me as far as the Manor gates."

As the lovers strolled through the wood carpeted by the swirling autumnal leaves, and made dark by the gaunt branches of the great trees as they swayed towards each other, stretching out long arms to the wind-driven sky, a man stealthily crept from behind a thicket and gazed after them.

He was a thick-set, coarse-looking creature, with a receding brow, from which the dark stubble of hair grew in irregular tufts; a sallow, dirty skin, with a blue haze round the bull-dog jaw, and a pair of cunning black eyes that squinted viciously did not enhance his appearance, while round his neck was twisted a dark red handkerchief, the rest of his attire being hidden by a long coat, stained and threadbare.

"So that is the young son up at the Manor!" he muttered, "and 'e spends 'is time spooning with a girl that calls 'erself a charity kid! I thought I 'ad the list of everyone at the Manor. That cove might be dangerous. If I 'ad found the girl alone I might 'ave got some coin or joolry to go on with. Just my luck!" he yawned, "if I don't touch lucky to-night I shall get on another crib."[2]

FOURTH CHAPTER.

At Bay!

It was twilight, that brief half hour between the lights when the pendulum of Time seems to stand still, and Life assumes the tender half tints of retrospection.

In the drawing-room of Maitland Manor the great log fire crackled and blazed, throwing deep shadows into the corners and touching with playful flickers the hidden gold in the hair of Lady Maitland and her son Woolf. She was looking exquisitely fragile in a soft clinging tea-gown, and as her white fingers caressed the head of the boy at her knee, a light shone in her eyes that was never there save when Woolf was near.

The room was full of that desultory chatter of people who meet frequently, and take no pains to entertain.

Heriot North had just arrived, and after greeting the various members of the family he sat down by Lady Maitland.

"Do you intend making a long stay at Melton, Mr. North?" she said. "I am afraid you will find it very hum-drum after——"

"After what?" he queried, dwelling on the beauty of her low brow and delicately-chiselled face that the firelight lent a strange pallor to. "The boredom and dreariness of an Indian station? No," he smiled, "I don't fancy that I shall miss India—now."

She smiled. "But when you return you will not go alone?"

He looked at her searchingly. Was this peerless woman laughing at him; or did she innocently stab him?

"I shall never marry," he said abruptly. "I don't think the Fates intend me to." Then he went on quickly. "You look pale, Lady Maitland; have you quite recovered from your unfortunate faint of last night?"[2]

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She shivered, then laughed lightly. "Oh, yes, thanks. I can't stand the heat, and the room suddenly felt very hot."

"But you have never fainted before, mummie!" broke in the clear voice of the boy leaning against her knee. Lady Maitland's hand touched the curls that lay loosely on the white brow of her son.

"Ah, Woolf!" she laughed. "I am getting an old woman now!" Then she broke off suddenly, and said, "I think Agnes would like a chat with you, Mr. North, so go and pick up the threads of the past."

"You send me away?" he asked in a low voice.

Lady Maitland looked at him for a moment. She was thinking deeply, swiftly. This man *must* be her friend, and to make him appreciate her patronage, she could do nothing better than let him compare her with the elder daughter of Sir Trevor. So she raised her pencilled brows slightly, and said; "I think you had better go, Mr. North."

As he was rising to do her bidding Muriel came up to them. "Oh, Mother o' Pearl," she said eagerly; "what do you think? Three robberies have taken place this last week at different houses in the neighbourhood, so I warn you to be careful of your jewel-case! Ivy told me that one of the gamekeepers in the spinney saw a man lurking about this afternoon!"

Lady Maitland smiled. "And you imagine that on the strength of that appearance, Muriel, the Manor will be broken into at dead of night?"

"Oh, Mummie!" breathed Woolf, with dilated eyes, and flushed cheeks, "I hope they will come into my room; I have never seen a burglar!"

"Why do you girls call Lady Maitland 'Mother o' Pearl'?" said Heriot North to Agnes, as he joined her in the window-seat a few moments later.

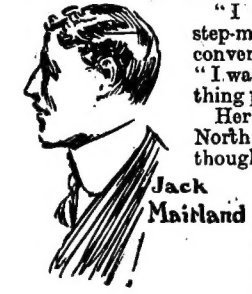
She looked at him with a bitter smile. "I think that is a fancy of Muriel's," she said slowly; "my step-mother's name is 'Pearl,' and Muriel invented that compromise—*I* call her 'Lady Maitland'!"

"She must have been a widow very young," he murmured thoughtfully.

"I know nothing about my step-mother's history," she replied shortly; "except that she was a Mrs. Vernon when my father married her."

Something in her voice warned Heriot North that she resented the introduction of Lady Maitland's name into the conversation, and remembering the object with which he had visited Maitland Manor the night before, he shuddered, for this thin, acid woman with the bitter eyes was not the fair, pretty child he had left behind him some years ago! Between her face and his another intervened; a perfect oval, with haughty, violet eyes, and a patrician mouth that a swift smile would suddenly change from coldness into warmth—the face of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife!

Agnes touched him sharply on the arm. "I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I am afraid I am hardly accustomed to the society of women now, after life in an Indian station."



"I only mentioned the fact that my step-mother seemed interested in your conversation last night," she said, slowly. "I was wondering whether there was anything particular that appealed to her!"

Her tone was significant, but Heriot North was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to notice anything out of the way.

"I do not flatter myself that Lady Maitland took more than ordinary notice of my conversation," he replied carelessly. Then, as Agnes was about to speak, interruption came in the shape of a servant with lights, and a note which he handed his mistress.

She looked at it curiously. It was in a strange hand, and bore the London postmark. She wondered from whom it came. She opened it quietly. The message was brief—of one sentence, but it was one that sent the red blood from her ladyship's lips, and a startled light into her eyes.

Lady Maitland went upstairs to dress for dinner.

The letter she had received was crushed into a ball in her hand, and when she reached her room she sent the maid away; she would dress herself.

With a sigh of relief she sank down on a chair. Her limbs were trembling, and she wanted to think—to think about the crumpled letter in her hand, the message of death that to her was life; for the last link was indeed buried in the grave—the grave of a man—"V. G. died a year after his release." That was all! She spread the letter out and pressed it to her lips passionately. Dead! That meant honour for her son Woolf, and safety for herself!

The faithful maid who had been true to her all these eighteen years, and followed her fortunes from afar, had done her the greatest of all acts in this cautious message. She hid it among her papers quickly. It was not safe to keep it about her.

Then after a while she rose and went into her dressing-room. The light had been switched on by her maid, and her dinner dress laid out; she would not be long getting into it.

Suddenly she stopped with a gasp of horror.

Standing in front of her dressing-table, that was littered with silver and jewels, was a man; he was not taking a single thing, but gazing intently into an open locket with eager eyes. She only noticed that he wore a dirty red handkerchief round his neck, and that his hair grew in ugly tufts on his brow.

"Who are you?" she said sharply. "What are you doing here?"

The man faced her with a sudden twist and an ugly scowl in his eyes that changed to a look of wonder as he saw the woman in her white, trailing skirts.

His hand sought his pocket swiftly, and gripped a long steel rod. Then as the beauty of the woman before him sank into his mind, he slowly glanced again at the open locket in his hand.

"If you don't speak I shall rouse the house," she said sharply, her hand going out to the bell-rope.

"Touch that bell, and you'll be more sorry than I shall!" said the man slowly, still gazing at her with an intent look of wonder.

"What do you mean?" she replied haughtily, dropping her hand at the sight of the thing the rogue held out menacingly; "I am Lady Maitland, and Sir Trevor Maitland is the Chief Constable of Melton. If you don't explain your presence in my room I shall immediately ring for help."

A strange smile flickered across the evil face of the intruder. He slowly returned to his pocket the "jemmy" in his hand, then said in an insolent tone:

"Now you 'ave introduced yourself, my lady, let me do the same. I am Mike Holland, ex-convict, and fellow-worker on the bog-land of Dartmoor with the *gentleman* in this 'ere locket along with yourself. 'E left before me, on license, and we all knew that 'is lovely missis would 'ave nothing to do with 'im when 'e got 'is lagging, but I didn't know as I was to meet the lady under *another* name!" And an ugly leer curled his lips.

"Now will your *ladyship* ring and give me in charge?"

Lady Maitland put out one delicate hand and grasped the back of a chair with unconscious strength.

What was the creature saying? What hideous tale was he telling her about Dartmoor and—convicts! Was she mad—or was the man before her an escaped lunatic? Her eyes fell on the open locket in his hand, one of hammered gold, she had thought long since lost. Then she understood that it was no dream, and that the "thing" before her held a secret she had imagined buried in oblivion.

She drew a deep breath; she realised that she might mak

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one rash move, and so precipitate fate. She looked at the man standing with insolent assurance to hear her speak. The expression on his face lent her the courage of desperation.

She laughed softly. "It is unfortunate for you, my good man, that your tale should so barely miss the target of truth! That locket is the property of a dear friend who died some years ago. I am forced to make this explanation," she said haughtily, "in case you should attempt to resume the topic. I will give you the chance of getting away quietly at once, or I will keep my word and send for my servants and the police!"

For a moment her calm scorn floored the ex-convict, and he would have obeyed her had not a sudden light sprung into her ladyship's eyes as he was about to put the locket on the table.

"Ah-ha! my lady!" he sneered, "you are not quite smart enough; you can't bluff me with your fairy tales. This picture here is the very spit of yourself, colour and everything. And you are going to pay me for 'oldin' my tongue, or Sir Trevor Maitland will know that his wife is——"

"You madman! Be silent! How dare you—how *dare* you threaten me in that manner!" hissed the beautiful wife of Sir Trevor Maitland, whose lovely eyes had grown haggard and fierce.

"All right, my lady," said the man coolly; "give me in charge, and I fancy I shall see you in the dock as well. Thieving is not so bad a trade as—bigamy!" he whispered. "I am an old gaol-bird—quod is nothing to me—but your ladyship would find it difficult to swallow."

She put out her hand to the bell. The ex-convict's eyes were fixed upon her white, drawn face with a malicious grin, yet admiring her pluck in defying him.

Suddenly, above the beating of the woman's heart, a voice rang, a laughing, joyous note—the voice of her son Woolf, and her arm dropped by her side.

On his innocent head would the greater shame fall! On *his* name would the stain rest! She could not combat this horror, because of the boy outside.

The convict watched the struggle between pride and the mother love fighting for the victory, and he chuckled grimly, for he knew he had won the battle.

"Mother!" cried the boy, "the burglar has been seen in our grounds! They are searching for him now!"

"Well!" said the man in a low voice, the moisture standing in beads on his brow, "Choose, your ladyship, between silence—and the greater charge!"

She turned savagely on him, a cornered fury, her motherhood up in arms for the boy outside.

"Hide in there!" she breathed, hoarsely, pointing to a deep oak wardrobe; "I accept—silence!"

Noiselessly the man obeyed her, and the heavy swing door of the wide, old-fashioned wardrobe closed on the retreating figure as the boy Woolf Maitland ran into the room.

Lady Maitland caught him to her with a laugh that might have been a shriek, so shrill was the note.

"Darling!" she said, pressing her lips to his brow, and gazing over the tangled curls at the wardrobe, "you should not rush into my room like this. I ought to be very angry!"

The boy laughed. "But you are not, mummie, are you? Besides, the burglar is being searched for—I came to tell you." The woman shivered.

"But not in my room, I hope, Woolf," she smiled. "Probably the wretched creature had disappeared long before the search began. But come, darling, we must be going down, the dinner-gong will sound soon."

He nestled closer to her. "How scrumptious you look, mummie, dear! I am so glad that I am your little boy, and no one else's!"

Her arm tightened round him. "Yes, darling, you are mine—my very own, and no one can ever take you from me!" she exclaimed passionately, again sending a glance of mingled hate and fear over the boy's head.

With linked arms Lady Maitland and her son strolled to the door, then she paused suddenly and said—

"Wait here, sweetheart! I have forgotten something!"

She swept back into the room, and glided up to the heavy oak wardrobe, then, with a quick gesture, she raised her hand and silently turned the key in the lock, a strange smile of triumph quivering across her face.

"That will do it!" she murmured, and a few moments later Lady Maitland and her son went down the wide staircase, laughing and chatting as only those who understand and love can laugh.

* * *

Three hours later Lady Maitland stood alone in her dressing-room. She had again dismissed her maid, and, though the night was not cold, she shivered, and her beautiful face looked white and drawn. Her violet eyes, burning and brilliant, were fixed upon the wardrobe as though fascinated by its grim, dark appearance.

She dragged herself up to it with trembling limbs. What was behind that silent door, what "thing" would be revealed?

Suddenly she turned and secured herself against intrusion, then slowly, and with cold fingers, she drew from her pocket the key she had slipped into it three hours before.

A cold moisture broke out upon her brow, and she bit her exquisite lips in an agony of revulsion, as the key turned noiselessly in the lock of the wardrobe.

What would she see? What horror must she face?

With one look of terror, Lady Maitland flung open the door, and then caught her breath with a sudden gasp.

The wardrobe was empty!

(Another long instalment next week.)

Mrs. Brown: "How could you define 'tact'?" Mrs. Jones: "I should say tact is the ability to make your husband believe that he is having his own way."

Tom: "Women are taking away men's occupations. Why, they're even manufacturing furniture." Tim: "Yes, that's so. My wife makes a bed every morning."

He: "Yes, darling, and it shall be the purpose of my life to surround you with every comfort and to anticipate and gratify your every wish." She: "How good of you, Harry? And all on 28s. a week, too!"

"Doctor," said the grateful patient, seizing the physician's hand, "I shall never forget that to you I owe my life." "You exaggerate," returned the doctor mildly; "you owe me only for fifteen visits. That is the point which I hope you will not fail to remember."

Some time ago a cabby was accosted by a constable while driving through the City. "Didn't you see me put my hand up?" said the constable. "Well, I thought it became dark all at once, but I had as much as I could do to keep my horse from shying at yer feet!" was the cabby's smart retort.

"Take that mantle," said the shopman to his assistant, "and put it in the window with a ticket announcing that its price will be three guineas for this week only." "Supposing we don't sell it, shall I change the price next week?" "Certainly. We never deceive the public. Next week its price will be £3 15s."

£5 a Week for Life!

THE CLOSING DATE

of the Competition, in which the above huge prize is offered, is announced in the current number of

PEARSON'S WEEKLY.

Those who wish to enter it now will find how they can do so in this week's *Pearson's Weekly*.

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A Scientific Wooing.

Telling of the Courtship of a Bashful Lover.

"IT comes to this," said Allen Locke, moodily. "I am in love with her, but she probably does not suspect it in the least. In fact, I feel positive that she doesn't! If I tried to—to—— Oh, well, woo her, to put it plainly!—she would probably laugh. So what am I to do?"

He had imagined himself alone, but a movement behind him arrested his attention, and made him turn with a guilty blush. He had unconsciously spoken aloud, and his innermost thoughts were thus confided to the new-comer.

He felt somewhat relieved to find that it was his sister who had entered, but he was not wholly at ease; Mary was a mischief-loving young woman, and she had often poked fun at him in a sisterly way on other subjects.

"So that's how the wind blows, Allen!" she cried. There was a suspicious twinkle in her eyes, but she bent over him and kissed him with an amount of warmth that surprised him. "I fancied that there was something wrong with you, as you were more than ordinarily quiet. I make a guess at her identity—Freda Rollinson!"

"Don't!" implored Allen. "Don't make fun of me!"

"You silly boy, I haven't the least intention!" declared Mary truthfully. "I am so happy myself that I want to see you happy. I came on purpose to tell you, Allen! I am engaged to Mr. Hutton!"

She blushed a rosy red at this confession, and proceeded hurriedly, without giving Allen time to offer his congratulations. "Now I want to help you! What can I do?"

Brother and sister were diametrically opposite in temperament. Allen was quiet and studious; like most men who take to reading, he was fond of solitude, shunning society, and consequently becoming awkward and bashful.

He was a thoroughly good-hearted fellow, capable of making a woman supremely happy, but scarcely likely to attract anyone of the fair sex.

Mary was fond of society, full of fun, and the life of any party of which she was a member; just as good-natured as her brother of whom she was very fond, and anxious to help all who needed assistance.

"Well, since you are in the same boat, only better off," said Allen slowly, with just the shadow of a smile on his lips, "I may as well confide in you. I am in love with Freda Rollinson, but I don't suppose she has given a thought to such a recluse as I. She has only seen me two or three times, when you dragged me out of my shell, Mary, to attend some of your parties!"

"Then if you want her, you must make her fall in love with you!" said Mary decisively. "We will call that point settled. I expect that is what Robert thought when he—when it occurred to him that he was fond of me."

"Y-e-s!" replied Allen doubtfully. "But Freda will not help me!"

"Which is a nice brotherly way of saying that I did some of the wooing with Robert," interjected Mary quickly. "And what if I did?" she added, with a pretty pout. "If a girl knows that a man is in love with her, and she is in love with him, why shouldn't she show it in a delicate sort of way? But that is not the subject in hand."

"No," laughed Allen. "So we will leave it, after I have said that I am not surprised at anyone falling in love with you, and we will get to my own affair. Mary, I accept your help. How shall we proceed?"

"Can you not strike a brilliant idea with all your learning? What are you studying now?"

"It is a book on telepathy. You know"—as Mary looked puzzled—"it is like this: You are a long way from me, and yet I know your feelings on certain subjects. I'll just explain by giving you an instance of telepathic communication that was published some time ago and is incorporated in this book.

"A man wanted to know the opinions of a certain prominent lady on an idea for improving the lot of people in small villages; this idea had been published, so the philanthropic lady had no doubt formed an opinion on it.

"He declared that he was able to sit down and write a summary of what she thought about it, without having seen her or communicated with her by speech or writing. In some mysterious manner her thoughts were conveyed to him by telepathic communication."

Mary's eyes twinkled.

"I can usually tell when Robert wishes to kiss me," she remarked with assumed demureness, "but I admit that the distance between us at those times is not great! But, joking apart," she continued eagerly, "that gives me an idea! You must make love by telepathic communication!"

"W-h-a-t?" gasped Allen slowly. "I don't understand!"

"Freda has been reading about thought-reading. This seems to me to be something like it. I'll set the affair in motion by telling her that you can divine the opinions of some people, and that I think her temperament is the sort you can do something of the kind with. See?

"She will be just anxious to test it; you will be placed in communication with her, and if you cannot work things so that she falls in love with you, quite legitimately, then you are not worthy to be a brother of mine!"

"No trickery! I must win her honestly?" declared Allen.

"Listen to me!" responded Mary decisively.

They spent some minutes in earnest conversation, and at its conclusion Allen was radiant.

The first move in the little comedy was made by Mary Young informing Freda Rollinson, with admirably assumed enthusiasm, that she had discovered that her brother could divine the ideas of certain other people.

"It's most wonderful!" she cried. "I mean the science of telegraphy—no, that isn't it! Telepathy, that's it! Of course, Allen is a mere novice, but he succeeds sometimes. I have taken the liberty of asking him to try with you. You know my brother? He is one of the best of fellows! I'm sorry for you, Freda, because you haven't a brother!"

"Yet you seem to have preferred someone else's brother to your own!" observed Freda, with quiet humour.

"Don't be personal!" exclaimed Mary, laughing. "I just teased him a little by telling him that he was too shy, too bashful, to write down his divination of a lady's opinions; and—just to have a game with him, you know—I insisted that he should write down your feelings on the subject of love! Poor boy! It was rather too bad of me! But he did it, and I've brought it here for you to see!"

Mary was discreetly ambiguous in the last remark, and

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Freda understood the meaning to be that Allen was not aware what his words were to be shown to Miss Rollinson.

The latter, as watchful Mary noticed, was not altogether pleased at the experiment, but Allen's sister counted on being able to excite enough interest in Freda in order to induce her to become better acquainted with Allen.

The divination was short; it ran—

"*The lady has not bestowed her affection on anyone yet; she has not met the man to whom her heart is attracted. Her feelings on this subject may be summed up thus: She will be exceedingly careful, almost calculatingly so, and will bestow her affections only when she has proved the man to be absolutely worthy.*"

If Freda had thought rather more deeply over the wording of this "divination," she would have seen that there was little more than guesswork in it.

Mary was still keenly observing her friend. She was almost certain that Freda had formed no attachment yet, but she was not quite sure of it, and she was a trifle anxious. Freda's face showed her that the guess was correct. Mary took a bold step; without waiting for a reply, she cried:

"It is true? I am so glad! It shows that there is something in this telegrammy—oh, dear! I can't remember the name of it! You must let my brother make another test!"

Freda was somewhat bewildered by the rapidity of Mary's moves; at first she had seen the difficulty of admitting to a man that her feelings had been correctly stated, but she found herself swept along as it were by Mary's rushing disposition, and before she knew it Mary had arranged the whole thing, and she was pledged to receive other "telepathic" communications.

"I have scored this time!" murmured Mary Young, as she made her way home. "That will set her thinking about Allen; she will be expecting other telees—I think that's a good word for them!—and if a woman expects to meet or hear from a man, why she is beginning to fall in love with him!

"Allen can go in and win now, for he's a really good old fellow, and Freda is sure to like him. He ought to make me a handsome wedding present!"

However, to her dismay, Allen would not face Miss Rollinson.

"It is too soon!" he expostulated weakly. "I have nothing to warrant the supposition that she would regard me favourably. I suppose it is very weak of me, but I'm so dreadfully nervous and sensitive that I can't risk it till I feel more sure that she likes me!"

It was therefore necessary that the so-called telepathic experiments should be continued; Allen scarcely approved the further prosecution of the plan, which appeared rather like deceit, but it was his only chance, and he plunged recklessly into it.

"I am dreadfully sorry, Freda," said Miss Young, a week later, "but my brother has not written another message yet. He says that there has been a change in your feelings on one particular subject, but he is diffident about writing it. The tiresome man wouldn't even tell me exactly what he had learnt. Shall I tell him that you are interested and would like to test the accuracy of this strange, unconscious communication?"

Now, Freda was but mortal, and any mortal would be curious in such circumstances. Mary made the thing so natural in appearance that Freda lost the sentiment that it was rather uncommon to enter into such an experiment as this.

She laughed, with the least trace of confusion, and said that she had no desire to press Mr. Young to do it if he did not wish to. So Mary went home with a light heart, and on the next day, she took with her the following divination:

"*Part of the previous statement, if penned to-day, would be incorrect, as circumstances have wrought a slight change. There is interest, growing interest, in someone.*"

"That is all I could get him to write!" cried Mary. "Is it not tantalising—for me, for *you* know who this someone is! He ought to have said the name; then it would have been more genuine. As it is, I don't believe—— Why, Freda, you're blushing! Then it *is* true!"

"You must not tell him!" cried Freda quickly.

"I won't breathe a word! Who is it? Oh, if you want to keep it secret, I won't thwart your desires! Then all I can do now is to tell Allen to send you a statement once now and again. Give it to me? All right, but I ought to be let into the secret!"

Mary's remarks on reaching home were to the point.

"I must not tell you whether your last guess is correct or not, Allen, but I am convinced of the success of my plan! I told you that it would excite interest, make her think of you more and more, get curious, imagine that one who could tell what her views and sentiments were must be the man intended for her—her affinity. Your plan now is to write two or three more messages and then see her!"

Love-making by telepathy was proving a grand success. Mary decided to take no more active part in future operations than to deliver the messages and notice the effect.

Freda began to take great interest in Allen Young, quite unconsciously at first, but afterwards she recognised the true state of her feelings and did not attempt to illude herself. Some mysterious power seemed to be drawing them together.

She received two more messages; they were to the effect that her feelings were becoming more intense and that she wished for the society of the someone. She avowed the truth of this to herself, and she wondered if the man who penned these slips experienced any desire to be in her society.

If there were anything in the science, or theory, he ought to be attracted to her, even unconsciously. Then a great dread seized her—could he by any chance learn that she loved him? No; it was not exactly love, but—— Then she refused to pursue the thought farther.

The day following the last message she saw Allen unexpectedly. He had perceived that the time had come for something more definite than telepathy, and his great love had at length enabled him to master his timidity. Candidly, he was a little ashamed of it!

He took the opportunity of escorting his sister in the stead of Robert Hutton, who had been called away suddenly. There he saw Freda Rollinson, to whom he needed no formal introduction, that formality having been performed before the commencement of the mysterious semi-correspondence.

"I am afraid I have been very unconventional, Miss Rollinson," he said politely and frankly. "I hope I have not offended you by——"

"Not at all, Mr. Young," she replied quickly. "I was much interested."

They were close to a quiet corner. Mary was chatting in an animated manner with some friends. Allen drew Miss Rollinson farther into the nook and begged her to be seated.

"I am glad that I have been able to enlist your interest in an occult science, Miss Rollinson," he said earnestly, "and once more I must ask you to pardon my presumption. I take the liberty of saying that the experiment afforded me great pleasure."

"It seems very wonderful," responded Freda affably. "I find it rather difficult to believe."

"I do not," rejoined Allen. "It does not appear to me to be anything marvellous that there should be some mystic sentiment affecting two persons, and even if those two persons are strangers and have the same object in view, even then, I say, the thought of one may act upon the other. But, in the present instance, I prefer to think that the connecting wave or sentiment was something deeper than a mere thought on the same subject."

Freda shot a swift glance at him from the corner of her eye.

"I do not think that there could be any deeper sentiment, such as you mention, in the present case. We were not strangers, it is true, but we were next to strangers. Then I should hardly call that a fair specimen of telepathy where a common sentiment—it must be affection, in fact—attracts two people and draws them together."

"Perhaps the sentiment—— Oh, never mind the occult sciences!" he cried, in a very unstudentlike tone. "There

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is a science which no one has ever properly fathomed yet. It is the science of love, Miss Rollinson—Freda! May I hope that you will permit me to give you some lessons in that?"

It was a sudden declaration, and Freda caught herself wondering vaguely why she was not surprised. For some reason which she could not explain to herself she was not astonished.

"Perhaps you would not find me an apt pupil!" she retorted, looking at him with a mischievous boldness which reminded him of his sister. "And I am not sure that you can teach!"

"I am positive about it!" he replied promptly. "And I think you could learn if you tried!"

He tried to take her hand, but she placed them behind her. This action, of itself, would have meant a rebuff, but the expression on her face belied it. With an alertness that was surprising in him, he saw his opportunity and bent forward quickly to kiss her while she was, so to speak, off guard.

She sprang to her feet just in time to avoid it, and laughed merrily.

"It was my intention to keep you at your distance by not allowing you to take my hand till you had shown some capacity as a teacher, but I see now that you lose no opportunities. I ought to make progress under such a professor! We shall see! Now I have something to confess, and perhaps you have too!"

She seated herself once more. He took her hand and pressed it, waiting for her to speak.

"It was *you* I wished to see, although you did not say that in your telepathic message! Why? Because I saw something in it; I read between the lines; and, in some way, I—I wanted to see you, Allen! And do you know what it was that I read between the lines? Come, it is your turn to confess!"

He looked startled for a moment; then said slowly:

"Did I give myself away!"

"I guessed it after the second message!" she said emphatically. "I lost faith in mysterious sciences after that! I was on the point of sending a telepathic message to *you*, but something inexplicable took possession of me and I did not."

"That was love!" said Allen dictatorily. "And that relieves me, for it proves that you are not angry with me for my device."

"Why did you not approach me in person?" asked Freda with quizzical shyness.

"Because I am not accustomed to ladies' society, and because I feared that my case was not hopeful and I dreaded a rebuff in person. But you will have no further cause for complaint on that score!" he assured her. "Quite the contrary; it will be difficult for me to keep away from you!"

He caught her in his arms and was about to press his lips to hers when Mary appeared.

"I say, when——" she began; but, on grasping the situation, she continued airily, and not at all nonplussed: "Oh, go on! Don't mind me! I've been along that path myself!"

And Allen took her at her word and kissed Freda boldly in front of his sister; which demonstrated quite clearly that he was becoming accustomed to the society of the fair sex.

T. G. Orford.

The Third Quarrel at Laburnum Villa.

The diligent reader of *Short Stories* will remember that at the christening of Gerald Sinclair, the first son (hereinafter called "Toddles") of Gerald and Ethel Sinclair, the second big quarrel of their married life took place. It behoves me now to set down the history of their third quarrel as a warning to young husbands and wives.

It was the first week in January, and the weather was endeavouring to act up to its wintry reputation.

Inside the drawing-room at Laburnum Villa, though, it was very cosy. The blinds were drawn close, and a cheerful fire was burning, with just that suggestion of frost which makes a fire look comfortable always.

It was Friday evening, and Gerald was looking the picture of sublime happiness as he sat contentedly sucking at his pipe, as also did Toddles upstairs in his cot also contentedly sucking his own particular pipe.

Mrs. Sinclair only allowed her husband to smoke his pipe in the drawing-room one night a week, and that night was generally Friday. In consequence Gerald doted on Friday nights, and his wife said that it was the Thursday after before the room was sweet again.

"Gerald!"

Mrs. Sinclair had spoken, but the object of her speech being lost in the latest popular novel, heard her not.

"Gerald!!"

Mrs. Sinclair spoke a little louder this time, but still with no effect on her husband.

"Are you going to listen to me, Gerald, or not?" Her voice rose almost to a shriek.

"Eh?—What? H'm! Yes! Er—that is, did you speak, dear?"

"Oh, no! How foolish of you, Gerald, asking me if I spoke. Why I've been screaming at you for a quarter of an hour."

"Phew!"

"What did you say, Gerald?"

"Nothing, dear."

"Then don't. You're always cross when you've got that wretched old pipe between your teeth; I—I wonder almost that you didn't marry a pipe."

"They can't talk, at any rate!" growled Gerald under his breath.

"I was silly ever to agree to your smoking a pipe in the drawing-room; very silly indeed!"

"Yes, dear." But the "oil on troubled waters part" did not sit well on Gerald.

"Why do you say 'Yes, dear,' when you know you don't mean it? I've a good mind to put my foot down and say that there shall be no smoking in the drawing-room at all."

At this dire threat Gerald retired from the argument and picked up his book again. In justice to Mrs. Sinclair I must state that she had been suffering with an aching tooth since the previous evening, and was somewhat irritable in consequence.

Presently a sniff came from Mrs. Sinclair, and then her handkerchief came out. "I hope (sniff) if Toddles (sniff) ever marries (sniff) he'll treat his wife (sniff) better than his father does (very big sniff)!"

Crash! The book was on the floor, and Gerald was by his wife's side, and his arms were round her—but I will not, of course, go into details.

About twenty minutes later on peace sat enthroned in the Sinclair household, and Ethel sat enthroned on her husband's knee.

"Gerald, dear."

"Yes, girlie."

"What I wanted to speak about was this. You know we proved I had a head for business?"

"Yes," Gerald managed to articulate, but he groaned inwardly.

"Well, I've been thinking that we aren't business-like enough! There's a lot of waste goes on which shouldn't. Now look at the money you waste each week on smoking; still, we'll pass that over. But this is the point—see how much your tailor and hosier charge you; I'm sure you could get good things for a lot less than you pay. Then you're dreadfully extravagant with boots, too. Aren't you?"

"Yes, dear"—Gerald had discovered by this time that it was always policy to agree with his wife—outwardly, at any rate. This is one of the golden rules of matrimony.

"Now, this is what I propose. That we keep each other's accounts. I'll buy and choose your things, and you can buy mine."

"And choose yours, too, of course?"

"Oh, no, Gerald, you couldn't choose my hats and dresses."

"All right, then; you don't choose mine."

"But I meant to."

"Well, then, I'll choose yours."

Ethel sat and pondered for some time, and then, seeing any other course would mean unconditional surrender all along the line, gave in.

Thus it was that Ethel Sinclair commenced an account-book headed "Gerald Sinclair, Esq.," and her husband did *vice versâ*.

It was three days after this decision that Gerald said: "I must be getting some fresh ties; I'll give Blenkinsop an order for some." Blenkinsop was his hosier.

"But you mustn't, Gerald; I'll buy your ties for you," insisted Ethel. "Don't you remember our agreement?"

Gerald gazed in blank astonishment.

"You surely haven't forgotten how we agreed to keep each other's accounts?" pouted Ethel.

"Oh, no, dear—er—of course not. Oh, no; whatever made you think I had?" answered the arch-hypocrite Gerald.

"I should hope not, because I have been to your tailor and chosen a new suit for you. He'd got your measurements, and I got such a pretty pattern. But, do you know, dear, I had quite a bother to get it, he said he did not make suits out of that cloth, but it looked so nice I asked him if he wouldn't do it. I only saw a little pattern, of course, dear, but it looked a perfect dream."

There reigned deathly silence when Ethel had finished, and then Gerald got up and departed out of the room.

When he was safely out of hearing he expressed his opinion on matters generally with a fluency and in a manner that would have done credit to an *habitué* of Billingsgate. Then a fiendish gleam came in his eye, and about half an hour afterwards he was on his way to his wife's dressmaker.

I omitted to mention that Mrs. Sinclair's dress allowance was £100 per annum, whilst Mr. Sinclair allowed himself £50 for a like period. Also, I omitted to mention that in this fresh agreement it had been agreed that each was to spend the other's quarter's allowance for them. Thus Gerald had £25 on the credit side for his wife, and Mrs. Sinclair had £12 10s. to dispose of on behalf of her husband.

When Gerald arrived home that night Mrs. Sinclair's first remarks after the usual salutations were to the effect that her husband's suit had arrived.

"What!" cried Gerald, "my suit arrived?"

"Yes," responded his wife.

"B-b-but I didn't try it on at all!" he spluttered.

"Oh!" said his wife in surprised tones. "Do men try on their own suits before they are finished? I thought they simply gave their measurements and the tailor made the suit. That was why he laughed, then, when I said he was to finish it straight off and send it home as it was a surprise. He said he thought it would be a surprise, and he didn't think I saw him laughing, but I did."

"Laughed, madam, I should imagine the man almost killed himself with amusement. I can see him shutting up his shop in order to laugh as much as he wanted!" stormed Gerald. "Now let me see this wonderful suit."

"Its upstairs on the bed, I didn't open it. You go up and put it on and I'll see how it fits."

In about two minutes' time there came a noise from above like the roaring of a bull, and then prodigious stamping of feet. This was accompanied with the yells of Toddles, who woke up and joined his parent in his song of wrath.

Mrs. Sinclair sat waiting impatiently and growing more nervous every minute until at last her husband entered.

Ethel screamed and held her hands up.

"Oh, Gerald!"

"This, madam," he replied, "is your doing."

There he stood in the centre of the room in a bright yellow suit with a scarlet check. He said nothing more for a time, and the silence grew agonising.

At last he spoke.

"I do not imagine, Mrs. Sinclair, that my tailor was romancing when he told you he did not make suits from this material as a rule, or that he was prevaricating when he said it would be a surprise. It is a surprise, but my heart is only normal, and for my health's sake let this be the last surprise of its kind. This cloth, madam, happens to be a waistcoat material only. I think if you've seen sufficient of your folly, I will go and garb myself as a civilised being," and with that he went.

Under these circumstances there was nothing left for Ethel but to weep, and this she did with right good will, until a knock on the door caused the tidal waters to cease. Then a maid entered with a large box.

"This has come for you, ma'am."

"For me, Blanche?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"All right, that will do. Stay a minute, though, are they waiting for an answer?"

"No, ma'am." And the maid withdrew.

"From Madame Blennerhatchet's," she muttered. "I've not ordered anything." And then, as is the correct thing with her sex, she did not open the box, but seemed to imagine that by gazing and wondering she would find out what was inside.

"What ever can it be?" she repeated time after time.

At last a happy inspiration struck her, she would open it. This she did, and there revealed to her eyes lay a winter costume of pale green cloth.

She stepped back a pace, and then once more inspected it. Yes it was that and no other. A coat and skirt in a pale green thick cloth.

"Gerald," she cried suddenly, as the idea struck her. "This is his doing, and green is about the only colour I can't wear. And the colour green it is. Ugh! it is quite bilious."

Just then Gerald entered the room, and his gloomy face cleared somewhat as he saw the open box and his wife's horrified expression.

"Like your dress, my dear?" he asked briskly. "I think it's a perfect dream."

"Brute!"

"What, you don't mean to say you don't like it? I thought it would be a lovely surprise."

"Beast!"

"Well, well, there's no pleasing a woman." And Gerald went out of the room, and rushing into the dining room, fell into an arm chair and laughed until the tears poured down his cheeks.

War reigned in Laburnum Villa that night, and in the morning both got up with colours still flying.

There were a few letters and a package for Gerald.

An unparliamentary ejaculation caused Mrs. Sinclair to look at her husband. He was gazing in blank, horror-struck amazement at the contents of the package he had opened. These same contents consisted of half-a-dozen our in-hand ties and half a-dozen bow ties. To say they were brilliant would be doing them an injustice. They were fighting the rainbow for supremacy.

"More of your work, madam?" demanded Gerald, with a gloomy face.

"Yes, Gerald, I ordered those," chirrupped Mrs. Sinclair.

Gerald fixed a stony glance upon his wife.

"Need I have asked such a question, though? Would

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anyone but one of your sex choose ties with a pattern like these? I had better put on the suit you bought and one of these ties, and go out as an advertisement for Maypole Soap."

"And —and I'll wear that fright of a costume you b-bought and go as an advertisement for Sea Salt."

Gerald gazed at Ethel, with the result that the impending tears began to flow.

Then there was another interval and once more peace reigned.

"Seems to me this economising business-like idea of yours doesn't work, my dear," he remarked, as soon as his lips were free.

"It isn't exactly a success, is it, Gerald?"

"I think I'd better see your account-book, dear."

"I—I'm very sorry, Gerald, b-but I've exceeded your l-limit by ever so much."

"What," shrieked Gerald. "You've spent more than £12 10s. on those ties and that suit?"

"I don't know how it is, Gerald. I added it up twice and it came to £18 12s. 6d. each time."

"Good gracious! Why you must have been swindled all round. Let's have a look at it."

Ethel dived into three drawers, looked under the table, in the writing desk, on the mantelpiece, in the bookcase, in the sideboard, and eventually found it in her pocket.

Gerald grabbed it and began to examine it with stern face and set jaw.

Presently his face relaxed and a smile began to creep round the corners of his mouth. The smile broadened into a laugh, and the laugh developed into a perfect roar.

"Oh, Gerald, what have I done?" questioned his wife anxiously.

"The head for business. Jee-oopiter! The head for business!" he gasped, and began to shriek with laughter again.

And this was the account kept by Mrs. Sinclair:—

GERALD SINCLAIR, ESQ.

	£	s.	d.
Cash paid to Mr. J. Swiffenheim, tailor, Piccadilly, on January 9			
For clothes	6	0	0
Cab to tailor		2	6
Tea		1	6
Cab home		2	6
Cash paid to Mr. Blenkinsop on January 11th for ties, twelve of them, 2s. 6d. each	1	10	0
Cab to hosier		3	0
Lunch		2	6
Cab home		3	0
Lace collarette	1	7	6
	18	12	6
Received January 6th	12	10	0
Have not got	6	2	6

"Oh, the business-like economy of it," Gerald ejaculated through his tears of laughter. "Added in the date as pounds! Oh, I'm going to choke. And what about the lace collarette? I haven't worn that."

"No, Gerald; you see I shouldn't have seen it if I hadn't been going to your hosier's. And it was such a bargain—marked down from £1 8s."

"The economy of it—ye gods!"

And now all is as of yore at Laburnum Villa.

E. Newton Bungey.

[Other Laburnum Villa stories which have appeared are—
"A Romance of an Unpaid Bill"—Feb. 21.
"What's in a Name?"—May 16.]

A FALSE ALARM.

How Mr. McSwat Showed His Bravery.

"WILLIAM! Hark!"

Mrs. McSwat sat straight up in bed and listened to a noise she seemed to hear downstairs.

"What is it, Lobelia?" inquired Mr. McSwat, drowsily.

"It sounds like somebody talking. Listen!"

Mr. McSwat listened. He, too, thought he heard something.

"I will see what it is," he said, speaking very loudly and moving very leisurely. "Don't be alarmed, Lobelia. We are well armed. Besides these two revolvers," he continued, in a high-pitched voice intended to terrify any unauthorised persons that might be in the house, "I have a heavy cane and a large glass paper-weight. Be calm, Lobelia!"

He crawled out of bed, collected his arsenal, and the procession moved downstairs in the following order: Mr. McSwat, with revolver in each hand, heavy cane under his arm, and paper-weight in pocket of his dressing-gown. Mrs. McSwat, ready to scream, with front hair in curl papers, lamp in one hand, and bottle of camphor in the other.

At the landing half-way down Mr. McSwat stopped.

"Lobelia," he observed sternly, "it will be necessary for you to go in front. You have the lamp. I will protect you." Mrs. McSwat took her place in front as directed, and the procession moved on again. At the foot of the stairs William stopped and took up a commanding position near the hat rack.

"Now, Lobelia, go ahead with the lamp into this room on the left. I will remain here to see if anybody rushes out. If anybody does rush out," he exclaimed, grinding his teeth in a manner horrible to hear, "I will put fourteen bullets through him, knock him down with this paper-weight, and break every bone in his body with this cane!"

Mrs. McSwat went into the room on the left and looked about.

"Do you see anything, Lobelia?" asked her husband, in a voice of thunder.

"No, William."

"Go through the other rooms," he roared, bracing himself firmly against the wall.

While William remained in the hall, armed to the teeth, pale with iron resolution and trembling with ungovernable ferocity, Lobelia explored all the rooms and came back.

"Did you see anything?" he demanded.

"Not a thing, William."

"Give me the lamp!"

He handed his weapons to Lobelia, took the lamp, and with dauntless bravery went through the rooms himself.

"It wasn't anything, Lobelia," he said, with extreme disgust. "You didn't hear anything or anybody!"

The procession moved up the stairway on the return trip.

"You must try to overcome this timidity of yours, Lobelia," said Mr. McSwat as he put down the lamp and relieved his wife of her load of deadly weapons. "If I hadn't been here to protect you," he grumbled, crawling back into bed, "you would have frightened yourself to death."

O. P. W.

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Complete in Twelve Lists.

BRAND NEW COMPETITION.

Cash Down. *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

And 25 Gramophones.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below will be found six paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom (or words that sound the same as the names). You must write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

No word or part of a word may be used more than once in making up the name of a Railway Station. In the event of the name of a Railway Station occurring more than once in a sentence, it should be underlined and written down each time. In case of more than one person finding the same number of words for each or any sentence, those words containing the largest number of letters will have preference. No name of a Railway Station may be composed of a single letter, either standing by itself or taken from any word in the sentences.

When you have discovered the names of Railway Stations in the sentences, underline (in ink) the words which go to make up the names (or words that sound the same as the names) and then on the line underneath each sentence write (in ink) the correct names of the Railway Stations to be found in each.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or Room Eight, SHORT STORIES, 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The names of the Railway Stations consist of one word or two or more consecutive words, or consecutive parts of one word, or two or more consecutive words.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, cut out the list below and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in SHORT STORIES. The eleventh list of sentences will appear next week.

In the event of a tie a further list (or, if necessary, several further lists) of sentences will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

<---------- CUT THROUGH HERE ----------->

EXAMPLE.

The oaks were swaying in the breeze, the cows were grazing peacefully, when out of the park tore a huge black bull.

The Oaks, Sway, Cowes, Grays, Park, Black Bull.

TENTH LIST.

55. It was at Trinity Church, Ludlow, that Charlie Peel was married two years ago.

56. A great discovery was recently made in the old castle at Stokesley of Roman coins and sculptures.

57. During a cricket match in which I played while at the seaside, nine out of the eleven men at the wicket were clean bowled.

58. Our losses in one battle were one trooper slain, twenty-four dangerously wounded, and eleven missing.

59. They made a rush all at once for a coign of vantage, so that the boat nearly capsized.

60. A niggardly man, you'll find, rarely leads a truly happy life.

NAME..... ADDRESS .....

.....

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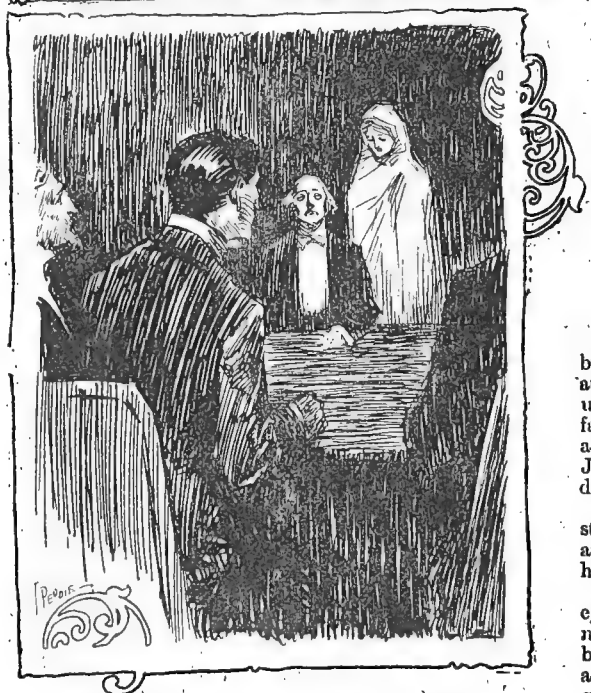
Begin reading now.

A Narrow Escape.

Being the second of six stories told in the Brighton Express and now related

BY

WINIFRED GRAHAM.



A shadowy figure appeared behind the chair.

The evil fogs had faded away, and crisp, frosty weather replaced the gloom. The carriage windows were white with a bewildering ice pattern, as of foliage, and the friends welcomed each other cheerily.

Mr. Carter was groaning under the weight of an enormous turkey, which his wife had commissioned him to bring from Leadenhall Market.

"Got a large family party at home," he said apologetically, depositing his straw basket on the rack. "Three married daughters and a son just back from India."

Stourbridge, who was empty handed, blessed his bachelorhood.

"You are a regular 'Carter' Paterson, eh?" remarked Harford, looking round for appreciation of his pun.

"Cards?" suggested Stourbridge, drawing forth a pack.

"No, let's see these stories out, one apiece, I say," Mr. Carter declared, who was renowned for his bad luck at play.

"I will tell you about Jack Thorne," said Blount, "and his lively investigations into the realms of spiritualism; it is a genuine tale, and as the chief conspirator has joined the great majority, it cannot matter repeating it. Besides, now I come to think of it, you none of you know Thorne or his wife, who are at present living in America.

"Jack was young and impressionable in those days, he yearned to plunge into the fathomless depths of psychological research.

"It happened that he made the acquaintance of a man named Seyfang, through falling in love with his beautiful daughter, Olga. The father was white, haggard, and old, with piercing eyes and long grey hair. He professed to be a medium and made money by strange practices, which Olga declared brought no credit on their household. She never appeared at the *séances*, professing herself a rank unbeliever in spiritualism. The girl nevertheless was completely under her father's rule, and he was a strong-willed, magnetic creature, and strangely enough, though Seyfang refused to listen to Jack's suit, the poor fellow became one of his most ecstatic disciples.

"The manifestations produced by the medium had the strongest effect on Jack Thorne's mind. In his gloomy despair at the disapproval shown by Seyfang to his daughter's lover, he fell a ready victim to the medium's art.

"'You can't marry the girl,' Seyfang would say, his greedy eyes glittering, 'she is made for something better. Olga, a mere child, endowed with the blessed birthright of beauty, to be wantonly sacrificed to a man who could not even afford her a carriage! Look at me! I am poor, living on a power given me from above, I cannot leave her a fortune with which to keep you both in affluence. She is born to be rich, and with her face could purchase a wealthy husband to-morrow.'

"'But I have plenty to live on,' Jack vouchsafed, 'she would never want. Besides, she loves me—are her feelings nothing in the matter?'.

"'Tut, tut,' cried the old man, running his lean fingers through his greasy grey locks. 'There is Colonel Leith—a man of means, with a huge family estate in the North and a house in town. He worships the very ground that chit of a girl treads on, and why? Simply because she has eyelashes as long as from my nail to the thumb joint, because she knows how to smile, how to speak, walk, move. Nature made such women for wealth and luxury.'

"'But she loathes the very thought of Colonel Leith!'

"'Bah! don't talk to me—I am a man of the world, as well as a medium.'

"Jack buried his face in his hands, and ground his teeth.

"'Come to our meeting to-night—I feel the devils are in me, or the angels—I know not which—but I fancy something will happen.'

"'Yes,' replied Thorne, 'I'll come.'

"Then he dashed out of the room with bent head and drooping shoulders.

"Olga met him in the hall. She raised her great tear-dimmed eyes to his sorrowful face.

"'You have seen my father again,' she faltered; 'he is inexorable?'

"'So far, yes, and the worst of it is he makes me feel a brute for wanting you.'

"Olga smiled mournfully.

"'I shall be true to you always, Jack.'

"He took her in his arms.

"The old man was heard calling Olga over the stairs. Jack

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slipped silently away, while the girl obeyed the commanding voice.

"'Come here,' he said, motioning her into his study.

"Then he closed and locked the door. Olga watching him silently. She was terribly afraid of her father.

"'Listen to me, child,' he began. 'I am in a fix, you must help me out.'

"A look of resignment crossed her face.

"'What can I do?'

"She had the air of one accustomed to submit.

"'My accomplice has fallen ill. *You* must take her place. I have ten people—ten men—coming to-night. It means ten guineas, which I can ill afford to lose. We must give them something for their money; I have never been known to fail. Why are you staring so stupidly? What is there to gape at, pray?'

"Olga's eyes were starting out of her head; she was pale to the lips and trembling.

"She rose as with an effort, and confronted him.

"'Do you realise what you are asking of me?' she cried hoarsely, her slight frame quivering with emotion.

"'Perfectly. Is it such a great hardship for you? The work is short and simple.'

"'How dare you even suggest such a thing?' she continued, with increasing anger. 'To fool Jack—the man I love—who reverences and honours me. To hoodwink him.'

"Her voice shook, she reeled against the mantelpiece, giddy with the horror that possessed her.

"'Don't be an idiot,' retorted Mr. Seyfang. 'Sit down and keep cool.'

"'To begin with, father, it is robbery. I have kept your secret for years, despising you in my heart, abhorring the deceit—the sin! My mother believed in you; it was her religion, her stronghold, her all. When she saw the baseless fabric—discovered that you were a common swindler, a clever actor, perjuring your soul for gold—the shock killed her. She told me with her dying breath, for fear that I also might live in faith and be awakened. She felt the smarting pangs of disillusionment—the agony of finding her mortal god dethroned.'

"Indignation blazed in Olga's eyes.

"'Have you finished?' asked Mr. Seyfang, with a sneer.

"'Yes,' replied the girl, turning to the door. 'I have given you my answer; let me go.'

"But Mr. Seyfang slipped his wiry figure between Olga and the door-handle.

"He took out the key and put it into his pocket.

"'No nonsense, now!' he muttered, pulling her roughly by the arm and forcing her back into the chair. 'The *séance* cannot be postponed, and you will do as you are told.'

"He looked at her in a way that always made Olga's head swim, and her will feel weak and powerless under his gaze.

"'No one can recognise you in the dark, have no fear, and you need not speak. Only disguise yourself in the white shroud, and appear in the usual way.'

"Olga fancied the devil must have taken possession of her father, as he spoke in his even, calculating tones.

"'But——'

"He flicked her across the mouth with the back of his hand.

"'Do as I say, or you will suffer for it!'

"Olga gasped for breath.

"Mr. Seyfang rose on his toes, and towered over the cowering form of his daughter.

"She shrank back involuntarily.

"'You understand,' he said, 'you have got to obey.'

"'Yes, yes; only don't look at me.'

"The mesmeric power of his eyes frightened her far more than personal violence.

"He unlocked the door, opening it with a majestic air.

"'Good,' he answered, 'you can go.'

"Utterly petrified with horror and disgust Olga crept from his presence, still numbed by that awful soul-piercing gaze. She walked slowly up to her room, feeling her way by the banisters.

"She had borne frequent humiliations, but nothing so bitter as this.

"To be dragged down to her parent's level, and forced to assist in a fraud appalled Olga inexpressibly. She flung herself down on her bed, and cried aloud in her agony of self-abasement.

"The terrible fear of detection froze her blood; to play the hypocrite was gall and wormwood to the girl's sensitive and upright nature. At any rate *she* would not be the one to deceive Jack, Olga declared, and straightway wrote him a hurried letter with fingers that hardly could form the words, so violently did they shake from agitation.

"'For my sake stay away to-night. I can give you no reason, but only implore that you will respect my wishes. Believe me, this is no girl's fad, but deadly earnest. Ask me no questions when next we meet—I could not bear it. I am miserable and distracted; you can help me by stopping away.'

"Then she folded the sheet, sealed the envelope, and dispatched it by hand immediately.

"When Jack opened the letter he had just come in before starting, and had been thinking a good deal of the evening's *séance* throughout the day.

"He had all a Briton's horror of being deceived, and Olga's manner had more than once brought a shade of suspicion to his mind.

"Jack fancied that her lip curled occasionally in disdain when Mr. Seyfang conversed with him on supernatural topics. From the first she had resented his interest and excitement, though it was good for her father's pocket, Jack advertising the old man's power widely among his friends.

"Now this letter added to the vague suspicions torturing his breast.

"He read it three or four times, then folded the letter tenderly, and laid it upon his heart.

"'Dear little girl,' he thought. 'It is hard not to comply with her wishes. But it is a duty I owe to myself and my fellows to sift this matter thoroughly. If we are being tricked by a plausible scoundrel the sooner he is shown up the better. We shall see if he then refuses his daughter's hand to an honest man who will only live to make her happy.'

"Jack's blood was up, for he scented treachery, and going to a drawer of his desk he took something out of a case and hid it away in his coat pocket.

"Then he went to Mr. Seyfang's house with a set purpose and resolution.

"The old man received his visitors cordially. He was in evening dress, and looked thinner and keener than ever. His eyes had a sinister light in their lurid depths. He smiled curiously as he took Jack Thorne's icy hand.

"'How cold you are, my dear fellow, and early too. We expect five more gentlemen for our sitting.'

"Jack addressed him in an undertone.

"'Might I see Olga, then, for a few moments before we commence?' he pleaded.

"Mr. Seyfang drew in his lips and shook his head.

"'Certainly not, Mr Thorne. The girl is foolish enough already, without being made more so. The less frequently you meet the better.'

"'Is she well?'

"'Yes, yes. Did you imagine she would sicken and die since the morning. Love is not a very killing complaint.'

"Jack turned

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away to conceal his disappointment and vexation. He felt a deep-rooted hatred spring to life in his heart against the white-faced man, who was looked up to with such awe and admiration by his own *clientèle*.

"He glanced round at the men assembled, they certainly were not an attractive crew. Jack began to wonder how he could have sunk to their level. They were all more or less pale, weary-looking individuals, some tired and *blasé* with much dissipation, over-dining, and over-drinking. They craved a new sensation, and sought it at the hand of the magnetic Seyfang.

"'I wonder if he mesmerises us all,' thought Jack, for the storm of doubt raged within him—a perfect tempest of suspicion. Seyfang's eyes were powerful enough in all conscience; he could imagine them subduing a wild beast, terrifying a child, fascinating a woman, ruining a man. There was young Blake, who had neglected his business and lost his position in Lehmann's firm, through his dreaming and gradual brain decay. He had sworn by Seyfang, and spent his last penny in publishing a book on the great medium's occult experiences.

"The work had been written down, and sold badly, its only mission being that of enticing a few more shoals of prey into Seyfang's net.

"'Do you think my wife will materialise to-night?' asked a quavering voice of Seyfang, at Jack's elbow.

"The speaker, an emaciated man of thirty, prematurely grey and careworn, clutched a chair for support as he spoke.

"The medium smiled in his sarcastic superior way.

"'How can I possibly tell? While in the trance I know and see nothing, all my senses are controlled by a greater force than any natural power. I believe my body is actually dead for the time being, I am (to speak anomalously) a living corpse.'

"'How horrible!' muttered the man, shuddering. 'Why do we wait?'

"He began to pace the room impatiently.

"'Calcutt and Montennis are expected. I said eight o'clock. We cannot commence till then. You are in a highly nervous condition, I should fancy, from your appearance.'

"'Yes. Could you give me a brandy-and-soda? I am awfully run down, low, and unhinged!'

"'Afterwards,' replied Seyfang; 'if you drink before, people are apt to say what is untrue, and doubt the reality of our experiments. We cannot be too careful.'

"'You mean they would say I was drunk?'

"'Yes,' replied Seyfang firmly.

"'I have not been the same man since the wife died. If I could look on her face again, or feel the touch of her hand, it might save me from perdition.'

"'If you are content to wait and persevere it will come,' Seyfang assured him confidently. 'Only have faith, patience, courage; miracles are not worked in a day.'

"The poor fellow sank on a chair with a sigh.

"'I ought to be a good subject, in touch with the Unseen; I am not long for this world if medical knowledge counts for anything.'

"'Who is that man—the widower?' asked Thorne of a friend.

"'Whitehurst, a good-for-nothing creature, who has ruined his constitution with spirits of both kinds. He took to it after his wife's death. She was a beautiful woman.'

"'A brace of telegrams,' announced Mr. Seyfang; 'one from Montennis, to say that he and the two friends he was bringing are prevented joining us to-night, and another from Calcutt: "Down with the plague," which means influenza; it's raging in his neighbourhood. That cuts us off four sitters. The sixth gentleman has evidently fought shy of the fog which is thickening, and being now ten minutes past eight, I think our *séance* should commence. Alas! that we are only five. Gentlemen, pray follow me to the inner room.'

"They rose and filed solemnly, one by one, through the heavy curtains he drew aside. The partially-dark apartment had an air of mystery; they pushed their chairs to the table, and seated themselves in silence, Mr. Seyfang at the head. His face was in gloom, the lights seemed to sink and grow less; they were almost in total darkness now.

"Hands were joined, and silence reigned. Only the chattering of Whitehurst's teeth broke the awful stillness of that ghostly chamber. Once or twice he muttered 'Sybil' under his breath, as though calling on his departed wife. Strange lights like stars came fitfully, weirdly, on the walls; they flashed before the wondering faces and faded.

"Suddenly a weak voice moaned 'Aubrey,' and Whitehurst leapt to his feet like a man distraught. He flung up his arms wildly, and gazed into the shadows, shrieking: 'Sybil! Sybil! She touched me; her hand; I felt it *here, here!*' striking his breast.

"Then he tottered back with a groan, and fell prostrate on the floor.

"He rolled over in violent convulsions. The lights flared up, and the men gathered round, horrified, amazed.

"'He's in a fit,' said Thorne.

"A young doctor bent down and caught hold of him.

"'No, he isn't. Nerves and drink. I will take him home if you fellows will help me to get him downstairs and into a cab. He is a patient of my father. Thanks! Support him so and he will soon find his feet. I shall not come back as it's a three miles' drive. Look at Seyfang dead asleep, and livid to the lips. I have had enough of this awful place for a first sitting.'

"So the young doctor bore the unfortunate widower away in a state of mental and physical collapse.

"The three remaining men crept noiselessly back; the lights were low again, and Seyfang, who had just come round, asked what had happened.

"They briefly explained.

"He leant forward with a sigh. 'Intensely tiresome,' he said. 'It has spoilt one of our greatest chances.'

"'Try again!' they replied in chorus. 'The night is still young.'

"Mr. Seyfang agreed.

"'Perfect silence, if you please, gentlemen, and implicit faith. One unbeliever might ruin all.'

"Then he fell back once more in his huge oak chair, and closed his eyes.

"Jack felt his heart beating wildly. He vowed this night to prove everything.

"Seyfang had previously informed him that he hoped Miss Thorne, Jack's deceased sister, might appear. She had been close to him on two previous occasions, and once the medium declared he had seen her gazing through the ceiling straight down on her brother. Half an hour of silence and patience, and then the quickening of Jack Thorne's pulses, the expectation of something about to happen. Again a voice, low and muffled, speaking in the air.

"'John!'

"Jack's sister had always called him John from childhood.

"He covered his eyes with his hands.

"'Seyfang,' he whispered, suddenly unnerved. 'I can't stand it. I——'

"But the words died on his lips, as the shadowy figure of a girl gradually appeared.

"It was Olga, her face concealed in a gauzy veil, white and floating, her body shrouded in hanging garments, disguising it beyond recognition.

"In spite of her external placidity, as she rose through the ground on a trap-door behind her father's chair, ready to sink back at the slightest movement of his head, a sense of deadly shame oppressed her. She was sickened by the false proceedings, that filled her with unutterable contempt.

"As she stood in the gloom, swaying slightly in her painful agitation, a vehement desire for knowledge robbed her lover of sense and reason.

"Hardly knowing what he did, Jack Thorne sprang to his feet, drawing something sharply from his pocket.

"'Are you dead or alive?' he hissed. 'I *will* know, come what may.'

"A sharp report, the smell of gunpowder, the agonised cry of a woman, the heavy thud of a senseless body at Jack's feet, with long dishevelled hair stained by a crimson flood.

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"In a moment he was bending over the girl, his revolver flung aside, the cold sweat of mortal agony and dread breaking out in the palms of his hand.

"He realised in a moment what had happened; he had been hounded to this crime by the sacrilege of playing with his dead sister's memory.

"He stared wildly down at the ashen features, his blood freezing in his veins, as he recognised the face of his beloved Olga.

"'Great Heavens! what have I done?'

"The old man had risen, grey to the lips, though his eyes flashed fire, as he beat his forehead with his fists.

"'Fiend! murderer!' he cried, 'you shall swing for this!'

"Jack Thorne, a moment since utterly paralysed, crushed to the very dust with hopeless remorse, now turned madly upon Seyfang.

"Springing at his throat, he seized him and shook him, till he was blue in the face.

"'You brute, you villain,' he cried, 'it is your doing. Your vile schemes have wrought this catastrophe!'

"Then he dropped him as if his touch were pollution.

"One man turned up the lights, while the other helped Jack to raise Olga.

"The hues of life flushed back, her limbs relaxed, and the girl they supposed dead, opened her eyes feebly, looking round as one bewildered in a dream.

"'She only fainted,' said one of the two strangers, 'and cut her head in the fall. It was a near shave.'

"Jack's relief was so great that for a moment he was speechless. There was a wild disorder in his thoughts—a tumult unappeasable.

"'Thank God!" he cried. 'She is saved.'

"Now he knew the reason for the desperate prayer of Olga's letter.

"Seyfang, suddenly grasping his precarious situation, turned appealingly to his three dupes, and gazed at them distractedly, with startled eyes.

"'I am in your hands, gentlemen, utterly and entirely,' he groaned.

"'Yes,' replied Thorne, 'at last! You have fooled us enough—obtained money by false pretences. But I'll show you up; and the public shall no longer be gulled by your devices.'

"Olga now rose, weak and feeble, but ethereally lovely, and clasped her hands in supplication. Tears moistened her sad blue eyes, through which her whole soul seemed shining.

"'For my sake,' she said, turning from one to the other, 'spare us the disgrace of an open revelation.'

"Her words amazed her lover, who knew well Seyfang's cruel treatment of his daughter, easily imagining the terrible pressure he had brought to bear in order to compel her to obey him.

"'I'll give it up for ever,' whined Seyfang, falling on his knees, 'to my dying day—I swear—I swear!'

"The two strangers turned to Jack.

"We would rather not be mixed up in this disgraceful affair. If we were idiots enough to come we should prefer to keep it dark.'

"But still Jack Thorne appeared unmoved, though he pressed Olga's hand reassuringly.

"'I would give anything for your promise of silence,' wailed Seyfang, noting the stony resolve on his features.

"'I take you at your word,' replied Jack Thorne.

"'And the price?'

"'The boon you denied me this morning.'

"The old man looked sharply across at his daughter. He dared not refuse.

"A radiant smile of joy and peace stole over Olga's face, while Seyfang the medium bowed his head."

* * * *

Blount ceased speaking.

"Have *you* ever been to a *séance?*" asked Mr. Carter.

"Yes. I was there that night. I was one of the two idiots!"

(Next week: "The Abduction of the Millionaire.")

Your Editor Chats.

THE tenth list of sentences in the competition will be found on page 687. Two more lists will appear.

I HOPE all my readers will peruse the first instalment of "THE BOND BETWEEN," our new serial. I can assure them that the story is well worth their closest attention. It is long since any work by a new writer has taken my fancy so much as Blanche Eardley's, and I hope that I shall soon hear from many of my readers that they agree with me.

THIS is decidedly an age of competitions, but a competition in which a human being is offered as a prize must lay claim to being a great novelty. Mr. P. Doubleyou, a well-known member of the staff of *Pearson's Weekly*, is the prize offered in a competition, of which full particulars are announced in the Whitsuntide number of that paper. I would advise all my lady readers who are in want of a husband to make sure of getting a copy of the issue of *Pearson's Weekly* for June 4th—on sale May 29th—which contains the necessary information as to how they may win the young man in question.

IN next week's SHORT STORIES, which will be the holiday week number, will commence a new competition in which the Index to Stations you already have will be required. It will not be a picture puzzle competition, nor a competition similar to the one already running, but something quite fresh. Tell your newsagent to reserve you a copy, so that you may be sure of having one. June 6th is the date, on sale Saturday, May 30th, instead of Tuesday, June 2nd.

WHILE you are making your plans to have a good time at Whitsuntide, I hope you will not forget those who are are not so fortunately situated. There are many dwellers in cities who never can go away for holidays. A large proportion of these are children, and it is for the children that the FRESH AIR FUND appeals. It only requires ninepence to pay the whole expenses of one child for a day in the country, including plenty to eat and drink.

I am sure that most of my readers could well afford to give away ninepence—some of them more—and I would ask one and all to send along just as much as ever they can spare that a record number of children's lives may be brightened this year. All contributions will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*, and should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings. Henrietta Street London, W.C. Collecting forms can be had on application.

Your Editor.

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THE PROFESSOR'S MISTAKE.

And the Happy Result that Followed it.

"What a blessed thing it is to be heart-whole and fancy free!" exclaimed Professor Johns as he stretched out his fine-built form to its full extent and stood gazing out of the window of his lodgings.

"Here I am, a man of forty, and have never experienced that poetical sensation called love, in consequence of which I may go where I will and have no one to drag after me; nor do I have to chide myself for having left someone at home.

"I am a bachelor, a thing for which I can never be sufficiently grateful. Now, after I am settled a bit, I will begin to write that new march and will not have to stop at every bar to answer some stupid question, or have my arm pushed hither and thither by the baby, as my friend James does, poor fellow! I simply pity him. He has genius, but he has a wife and child also, and those two absurdities would kill any genius!

"How any man can become so foolish as to allow love to overbalance him is past my comprehension! Yet there are few who do not."

He turned away from the window and began to unpack his bag with as much care as a woman might have used. His task completed, he strolled back to the window, where he stood looking out. On the house directly opposite, his gaze became riveted. Seated at the window was a young person whose golden locks and beautiful complexion reminded him more of a picture than of anything human.

This individual was totally oblivious of the professor's interest, and seemed to see nothing but the work upon which she was engaged. Now and then the ringleted head would be rested upon a slender white hand, to be raised again in a short while as though seeking thoughts from the heavens.

The professor stood gazing at this fair young face as if spellbound, until awakened from his comatose state by his host's invitation to the evening meal.

Next morning Professor Johns got out his materials, and settled himself to work, but, happening to raise his eyes, met a pair of very serious blue ones contemplating him from the other side of the street. To his surprise, and, we think pleasure, the golden head of his neighbour gave a friendly nod, and was immediately lowered over its task.

Thus it continued for several days, and, although the professor had no wife or children to stop him at his work, he had nevertheless made little progress in it at the end of the week. He determined not to sit near the window while composing.

This determination wrought little or no good, for at the end of another week, between walking to the window to look at the clouds, and thinking of golden heads and blue eyes, he had made less progress than during the week previous. So he decided to lay the march aside for a while. It was all well enough for men who had to drudge to do it, but that was not the case with him. He might lay his work aside until he felt more like finishing it.

Strolling past his landlord on his way out for a walk he inquired: "Who are our neighbours across the way?"

"Snoogles lives there," was the answer.

Great Heavens! To think that so beautiful a creature should have fallen heir to such a name, thought the professor.

"Their daughter seems to work very hard. What is her occupation?"

"Expect the gal's hands are full helping the old woman with her lodgers," answered the old man.

"They take in lodgers, then," said the professor, greatly relieved. The young person at the window was without doubt one of them.

"Do you happen to know the young person who generally sits at the window?"

"Snoogles says they have gone daft; do nothing day in and day out, but write music and play it!"

A musician, then, thought the professor, and small wonder that I should feel so drawn in that direction.

"Funny how some people waste their time," ventured the old man. The professor answered by a nod, passed out of the house, and down the street.

Returning, he was provoked to find his gaze riveted upon the worker at the window; also to note the pleasure with which he received that friendly nod. At the end of a month the professor had thoroughly studied his attitude towards the young person in the house opposite.

He was confident that he had become one of those fools who, having lost their heads, are willing to lose their liberty also. He decided to persuade the golden-headed student across the way to join her lot to his.

To prepare the way, he wrote, asking to be of service in what seemed to be a very troublesome part of the young musician's composition. His advances were met with a polite refusal, which ran thus—

"Dear Sir,—*Many thanks for your proffered kindness, but I always make it a rule, when puzzled, to work it out by myself.*

"Gabriel."

So her name was Gabriel—truly a beautiful name! To his dismay the professor found that his pen worked faster than his thoughts. He had positively written the name Gabriel more than a dozen times. This was developing more of the fool than he ever dreamt was in his nature.

In disgust he tore the paper into little bits, and tossed them from the window. Ye Fates! Raising his eyes he beheld the object of his thoughts sitting in her usual place, the slender hand resting against the golden head, and a perplexed look upon the young face.

This completely unbalanced the professor. He loved his young neighbour. There was no question about it. Why should he sit quietly by and allow each day to add to the toil of that young life when he possessed money enough to keep her in luxury, and knowledge enough of music to help her towards the goal of her ambition?

Should he be governed by that foolish idea which had ruled his former life, or by the promptings of his heart? It might be foolish, but he would do as his heart bade him. Drawing a chair towards his desk, he seated himself and penned these lines—

"My Dear Gabriel,—*I have a favour to ask of you; a something which I have never before asked of anyone. Though an unusual manner of approaching a lady upon so serious a matter, believe me, it is with all due honour that I ask you to join your fortune with mine.—Very sincerely,*

"Professor Johns."

If the professor could have seen the merry expression that shone in those blue eyes as their owner read this missive, he would have been even less happy as he awaited an answer. It arrived in due time, and ran thus—

"Professor Johns,—*Will you kindly accept my sincere thanks, but Fate has not been kind; she has given me no fortune to join to yours.*

"Gabriel."

The dear, sincere child, how could he succeed in making her understand? If only she would grant him a half-hour in which to explain! He was a determined man, so once more a note found its way to the house opposite.

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Once more the blue eyes caught up their merry expression, and the following came back to the professor—

"My Dear Friend,—*This love that you have expended upon me is a great mistake. Believe me, it has been misplaced.*

"Gabriel."

Determined not to lose this precious treasure through what he deemed a young girl's shyness, the professor allowed a week to elapse before he made a very careful toilet one evening and betook himself to the house opposite. After a few moments he was shown into the dimly lighted room. Seated by the window was a little golden-haired figure clothed in black.

"I hope you will pardon this intrusion, dear Gabriel, but I could no longer stay away from you," said the professor.

The little lady in the chair rose and explained that she was not Gabriel, but Gabriel's sister!

Noting the confused look overspreading the professor's countenance, she hastened to explain that persons quite frequently mistook them from the window. Would not the professor await Gabriel's return? He had gone out, but would soon be back.

Professor Johns did wait, and between merry little stories and witty sayings from Gabriel's sister, found himself well paid for his visit. She incidentally mentioned that she had only arrived that day. It had been so lonely for poor Gabriel, who was such a student, and she had come to keep him company.

* * * * * *

The professor is married now to someone wonderfully like Gabriel. What is more, he does not seem to object to that someone dragging about after him or asking questions; and from certain scraps of information which have come to him, Gabriel feels assured that his sister has fallen heir to the best of husbands. Like a good boy, however, he keeps his secret fast locked in his own heart. **Alice A. Moran.**

A Love Tangle.

Telling of a Doctor, His Maiden Aunt, and a Nurse.

* * * *

"I will not have it!" declared the old lady positively. "If Mark takes up with a nurse, he loses the allowance I have provided for him, and he gets nothing when I am gone! A nurse, indeed! Here have I paid for his education, enabled him to study medicine, secured him an appointment in a large London hospital where he can gain experience, and offered to buy him a good practice when he is fully qualified, and he has the audacity to set his affections on a nurse! They are all designing creatures! Of course, she knows his prospects, and he is a weak simpleton!"

So Miss Frances Frenton, the maiden aunt of Mr. Mark Holland, the rising medical practitioner, wrote a severe letter to her nephew, which he received on the following morning.

"I call this an unwarrantable interference with my liberty!" cried Mark Holland, when he had finished the reading of the unpleasant communication. He was not without a spice of his aunt's quick temper, and the letter made him angry. "I admit that she has done a lot for me, but it is going too far when she threatens to cut me off because she has heard I intend to marry a nurse.

"Well, I cannot marry anyone just yet if she does so; on the other hand, I must give up the sweetest girl in the world for ever! No, I won't! I'll take my chances without aunt's money, and trust to my ability to make an income that will enable me to marry in three or four years, anyhow, and that will be better than giving her up for good. Besides, I am getting a little tired of Aunt Frances' dictatorial manner."

If he had reflected a little more he might have tried some plan that would have led to a compromise and even to reconciliation eventually; but that touch of quick temper spoilt the chance of compromise, and Miss Frances Frenton received, in turn, a note that made her compress her lips and alter her will.

It was very quickly observed in the hospital that Mark Holland's bearing towards Nurse Walton was changed, and none noticed it more quickly than Nurse Walton herself.

A cold chill struck her heart, and her face lost its happy expression, her cheeks lost their colour. Holland seemed desirous of avoiding her, and she attributed this change of demeanour to a change in his sentiments towards her.

With her hand pressed to her left side, she sat down to ask herself why she felt thus. Holland had not made any positive declaration; she could not say that he had given any absolute indication that he was in love with her; yet——

Ah, yes! Love can be expressed in so many ways without words, and she could recall so many acts, so many little things, to confirm her belief. And she had fallen in love with him!

Now he was throwing her over! For whom? She waited. Rumour is always busy, and it was not long before a whisper reached Madge Walton that Holland was behaving gallantly to Nurse Hoyle. Naturally, she saw nothing of this; if he were throwing her over, she would not see him paying attentions to another—not yet, at least.

Madge Walton surveyed herself sorrowfully in her mirror; she had been called handsome, and she was twenty-six, her beauty compared favourably with that of her rival, and their age was the same.

These two nurses had been regarded as beautiful and attractive; they were ideal nurses. Why should he have tired of one and passed her over in favour of another who was not her superior in any way?

"Men are fickle, they say! There is no other explanation, and I must suffer for my foolishness in thinking that he loved me!" she murmured, with just a trace of bitterness in her voice. She sank on to her knees by the side of her bed and sought comfort in tears.

Mr. Mark Holland's appointment at the hospital was advantageous for the practice it gave him, not on account of the salary atached to it. The remuneration was little more than nominal, so he had to seek work outside in order to live suitably.

He found employment as an assistant to one of the doctors, who had a large private practice, and was getting old, and this prevented him from spending so much time at the hospital as he had formerly done.

"I cannot speak to her yet!" he would say to himself. "A man cannot ask a woman to become his wife till he has something to offer, and I have next to nothing at present. Moreover, it is hardly fair to pay attentions to her; that might be depriving her of a better chance, which would be wrong, seeing that I cannot be certain that I shall have anything good to offer if she waits for me.

"Bother Aunt Frances! I don't think she has dealt fairly with me! I will keep Madge in view. I am half inclined to believe that Nurse Hoyle—— H'm, I mustn't misjudge people but she has been very sweet lately!"

Mr. Mark Holland was disagreeably surprised one morning,

on reaching the hospital, to learn that Nurse Walton had resigned; she had been gone several days, and her intention was to become a private nurse.

When safe from observation, he gnawed his moustache, and permitted a disconsolate expression to steal over his handsome features. He tried to find her address, but without success, and he lost, from that day, much of his geniality.

There was one man who could have given Holland the information he wanted, but that man was not asked, and remained silent. This was Dr. Miller, an elderly man, who had always taken a kindly interest in the orphan girl now known as Nurse Walton. She went to his private consulting-room in Harley Street and asked him to recommend her as a nurse.

"I am sorry you have left," he said pleasantly, "but I really think you will do better privately. Certainly! I shall have pleasure in recommending you, but you look ill yourself, and ought to have a rest!"

"I intend to have a week at the seaside, sir; then I shall be ready. I have been—upset—lately!"

"Yes," said Dr. Miller, in that peculiar way which suggests that the speaker knows all and yet leaves the hearer in doubt whether he knows anything or not.

A week later she appeared again, and Dr. Miller was able to give her a case which employed her for a month. She had not been free more than two days when he sent for her.

"An old friend of mine in the country has asked me to find him a born nurse, with proper training, for an awkward patient. This is a crochety old lady who has bronchitis and complications. She has money, so the engagement will be remunerative. I thought of you, but there is one little difficulty," said Dr. Miller. "That is," he went on, as she was about to speak, "the old lady is, I find, Miss Frenton.

"She has found out that her nephew, Mr. Mark Holland, whom we both know, intends to marry a hospital nurse, and she has cut him off. So," he added slowly, "it seems that he will not be able to marry Nurse Hoyle—as he is said to think of doing.

"Now, Miss Frenton is dead set against nurses on that account, which will give you trouble, and it is just possible that you might meet someone if she gets very bad and relents!"

Madge Walton was thankful to her old friend for pretending to be hunting for a letter. When he turned to her again, she was composed.

"I'll try it, sir!" she said quietly. "Perhaps I may be able to uproot Miss Frenton's prejudices. The honour of the profession is at stake, it would seem——"

"She thinks nurses are not ladies, but designing adventuresses!" interposed Miller quietly.

"If I can upset that notion, Mr. Holland might regain her favour, and have the opportunity of"—her voice faltered ever so slightly—"of marrying the woman of his choice!" concluded Madge bravely.

After her departure Dr. Miller uttered his thoughts aloud.

"Brave girl! It is surprising what a woman will do for the man she loves, although he may not have treated her well. I don't understand Holland's action. This is a queer move, and it will be interesting to see how it ends!"

The appearance of Nurse Walton in the residence of Miss Frances Frenton was a peculiar experience for the former. She found herself face to face with the arbitrary woman who had spoilt the prospects of the man she loved, although that love had, alas! been given unasked, as events had proved. This invalid was Mark's aunt, prejudiced against trained hospital nurses and ready to sacrifice the happiness of two young people for a whim.

Miss Frenton glared from the bed at the nurse; then she turned to her doctor and said, acidly: "I want a *nurse!*"

"I have brought you one!" retorted Dr. Wynne bluntly.

They had known each other for thirty years; he understood her peculiar ways, and treated her accordingly.

"This is Nurse Walton," he went on. "She is recommended to me by one of the finest doctors in the Metropolis, who guarantees her skill. What more can you desire, madam?"

"An older woman!" said the patient shortly. "These young nurses are all——"

A fit of coughing seized her. Madge stepped forward, raised her in bed, firmly and gently, and afterwards administered a restorative to the exhausted patient.

In spite of herself, Miss Frenton tacitly admitted that Nurse Walton was capable. The medical gentleman retired with a smile of satisfaction.

"You will have your work cut out, I am afraid," he said to the new nurse. "She is very ill and will be worse, and to cap all, she is very irritable and crochety. Nevertheless, I believe she is a good woman at heart. I am sure she has a soft spot in that portion of her organism if you can manage to find it."

"I'll try to discover it, sir!" responded Madge, confidently, at which the doctor smiled.

The position of nurse to Miss Frenton was anything but a sinecure; her illness took an acute form and both doctor and attendant had a hard fight to pull her round.

Mrs. Mason, a faithful old housekeeper, helped to the utmost, but the work of looking after the patient fell almost entirely on the nurse. The doctor was afraid that she would break down, and thought of wiring to his friend for another nurse to help, but Madge begged him not to do so. "I want to have the credit of this all to myself, and I am sure I can go through it!" she pleaded.

The doctor agreed, surprised at her devotion, but he did not know that Madge wished to obtain a hold on the patient's gratitude for the sake of the man who had, as she thought, left her for another.

Madge Walton shivered one day when she saw a letter on the hall-table ready to be posted; it was in Mrs. Mason's handwriting, and was addressed to Mark Holland. She sought the housekeeper and made inquiry with assumed innocence.

"I understand that Miss Frenton's nephew incurred her displeasure about something, and is not now recognised by her. But, as she is so ill, do you not think that he should be informed?"

"Bless you, nurse, don't let Miss Frenton hear that!" gasped the housekeeper in dismay. "I don't mind telling you, because I know you won't tell tales, that I wrote to Mr. Holland about it, and I had a letter from him this morning. I have just written to him again. I like him, and a man ought to be free to marry who he likes!"

"Does Mr. Holland propose to come here?" asked Madge, and her heart seemed to stop beating as she waited for the answer.

"I advised him not to," replied Mrs. Mason. "At any rate, not yet!"

"He must not come till I say so!" said Nurse Walton firmly, presuming on her authority to overawe Mrs. Mason. "And did you tell him my name? I suppose you said that a nurse was here?"

"Yes, but I didn't say anything about you."

"That is well. Please don't mention my name. You see," she added thoughtfully, "if he came and knew my name, Miss Frenton might think that I had been corresponding with him, and that would set her against me and she might be ill again."

"That's true, nurse!" said the simple Mrs. Mason, profoundly impressed.

Madge Walton felt that she was safe, so far. She must have time to complete her task, and then, when she was gone and he and his aunt reconciled, he might learn who had effected the reconciliation.

At last, after many weary days, the time came when Miss Frenton could lie on the couch near the window, in the rays of the unusually warm Spring sun, and listen to Nurse Walton reading.

"Stop reading for a while; I want to talk to you!" commanded Miss Frenton. The tone, although one of command, was more gentle than it had been for many years. "You have been very attentive to me, and I am not an ungrateful woman, whatever other people may say! You look ill; you must have a rest!"

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"I shall soon be able to leave you, Miss Frenton," said Madge. "My work here is nearly finished. Then I shall rest awhile."

"Nonsense!" snapped the invalid, with some of her old acerbity. "I shall go away as soon as I can be moved; *I* shall go to Bournemouth, and you must come with me!"

Madge shook her head slowly.

Miss Frenton, at the risk of making herself ill, resumed her remarks in an energetic manner that was astonishing in one who had been so ill.

"I shall require a nurse for some time yet, and I can pay. You must come!"

Madge could hardly restrain a smile; the difference between her reception by Miss Frenton and this new turn of affairs was very great. She was only human, was Madge, and she could not resist the retort.

"You can have a companion, Miss Frenton, not merely a trained nurse!"

Miss Frenton shot a quick glance at Madge. Her face showed that some inward struggle was taking place. After a minute's silence Miss Frenton spoke.

"You have heard that I have said hard things about hospital nurses, and you are hitting me back. You are taking up the cudgels on behalf of the profession. That is fair. But you are not a hospital nurse, and——"

"I was till a few weeks before I came to you!" interposed Madge.

"Well, then you are an exception!" said Miss Frenton, shifting her position.

"That is not fair," interposed Madge again, gaining courage as she went on. "You are prejudiced, which is unjust. You know nothing of hospital nurses. Why are you so bitter against them?"

Again Miss Frenton was silent for several seconds.

"I do not wish to be unjust; that remark hurts me," she said slowly. "I will tell you. I educated my orphan nephew because he was the only child of my sister, and she was dear to me. I gave him all that was necessary to place him in a good position in life. Then a designing nurse captivated him, and gained such a hold on him, that he preferred to cast me aside—me, who had been a mother to him—and cling to her!"

"Did you object to his marrying at all?" asked Madge. "No? Then why object to her as a wife?"

"If she had been a lady," began Miss Frenton. She was feeling a trifle ashamed of her action, for the first time. "If she had been like you, now, I would have welcomed her!"

A spasm crossed the sweet face of Madge Walton, but she controlled her voice as she replied:

"I scarcely think that I am an exception; I believe that you would find her an agreeable companion." It was hard—so hard!—to plead for the one who had taken her place in the heart of Mark Holland, but she went bravely through her ordeal. "You have never seen her, so you cannot judge honestly. You imposed your will on your nephew without even giving him the opportunity of defending his choice. What sort of a man would he be who would meekly give up the woman he loved without a struggle?"

Miss Frenton winced at this outspoken remark. She looked with admiration at the beautiful face of her nurse, flushed with excitement, and sighed.

"Perhaps I was a little hard on him," she admitted. "Yes, I suppose I ought to have seen her. But that is all over now; she would never forgive me, even if he did! Let us talk of something else. You must come with me to Bournemouth; I am a lonely woman and I want a companion. You would make a sweet companion, nurse!"

Madge laughed awkwardly; the happiness of being a helpmeet and companion to the man of her choice was denied to her. She shook her head.

"You can have the companionship of a niece if you are morally strong enough to admit that you were wrong—as you ought to do!—and reinstate your nephew!" she asserted boldly. She felt that she must fight for him, her love! "He has constantly inquired after your condition and would have come had he not been forbidden!"

Before Miss Frenton could reply Mrs. Mason entered.

"Mr. Holland is here, miss, and says that we have no right to keep him away. I was to tell you that he wished to inquire after your health and did not come for mer—mercenary motives! I think that was it!"

"You must see him!" cried Madge, turning pale. "You owe it to him, and if you think that I have any claim upon you, repay me by thinking better of him! I will go!"

She flitted upstairs, where she waited with a white, haggard face. Mark Holland was shown into his aunt's presence, and had great difficulty in repressing his amazement at seeing her extend a feeble hand with a smile and an apology. Whatever had happened?

"I don't think I should ever have altered my opinion," said Miss Frenton, a little later, "if I had not been ill and been attended by a former hospital nurse. I haven't seen your future wife, Mark, but if Miss Hoyle is like my nurse, you have the sweetest——"

"Miss Hoyle?" queried Mark. "I'm not going to marry Miss Hoyle! Where did you get her name from? No; the woman I would have chosen is gone; before I could make her an offer, she left the hospital and I lost trace of her. I had to discontinue my little attentions, owing to the change in my circumstances, so I expect she thought I did not care for her, or perhaps she did not care for me! I should like to see this nurse of yours; what is her name?"

"Walton."

"What!" cried Mark, springing from his chair and almost causing his aunt a nervous shock. "That is *she!* I must see her!"

Dreading the ordeal, Madge Walton obeyed the summons reluctantly. She entered the room all of a tremble, although outwardly calm.

"Miss Walton——" began the patient.

"Madge!" interrupted Mark Holland impetuously. "Why did you leave me? Who told you that stupid rumour?" He held out his arms, eager to enfold her, yet uncertain whether she cared for him sufficiently to come to him. "I have tried to find you! My aunt has told me all. Madge, will you come to me?"

Something affected Miss Frenton's eyes at that moment; they began to water copiously, and while she was using her handkerchief, she could not see what was happening. She heard a glad cry, that was all. When her eyes were clear again, Mark and her nurse were standing before her, hand in hand.

"Do you think you would mind living with us, aunt, and permitting my wife to take care of you?" he asked.

Madge gave a happy little laugh as Miss Frenton caught her disengaged hand, drew her nearer to the couch, and kissed her.

"I don't suppose it will be so sweet as those you have just had," she said with a malicious twinkle in her eyes, that quite transformed the wan face and made Madge blush furiously, "but it is just as genuine in its way."

G. Merriam.

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THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

You Talk in Riddles.

The explorer and the war-correspondent strode across the park in the direction of the curious grassy hollow that contained the ancient and weather-beaten pile of the mausoleum. Edward Stormont was mute, revolving his own thoughts, Paul Jerome was silent also, watching his friend and host. A finger and thumb thrust into one of his vest-pockets, held, half-unconsciously, the scrap of jewelled tortoiseshell.

"You spoke," said the explorer at length, abruptly, and without checking his swift and angry paces, "of having been, for some time, cognisant of a mystery. What did you mean?"

Jerome did not answer directly. "Let us see first if my suspicions are correct," he replied, "then you shall have the whole story."

Edward Stormont bit his lip. "Suspicions," he repeated, and added a trifle sharply, "it seems to me, Jerome, that if you had suspicions of such importance as would now appear to be the case, I ought to have been informed of them."

The war-correspondent made a gesture of dissent.

"No, no," he said gravely, "the more serious a suspicion is, Stormont, the more necessary it should be confided to no one until it has been substantiated. Besides, it is only within the last ten minutes that I have been given a clue to the solution of the problem with which I have been wrestling. I have not even had time to work out the details."

"And am I," asked the explorer, drily, "am I not to inquire what this same clue may be?"

"Your daughter's name," said Paul Jerome, "the two words, 'Moira Stormont.'"

Edward Stormont plucked irritably at his iron-grey beard. "You talk in riddles, Jerome," he exclaimed. "I will not wrong you by supposing that you have not an adequate reason for all this assumption of mystery."

Jerome quickened his stride. "Assumption, my dear Stormont," he retorted, "there is no need for an assumption of mystery. The whole thing, as yet, is one to me. I cannot even persuade myself to credit the amazing conclusion that forces itself upon me. That is why I am anxious not to put it into words until I have some tangible basis for it."

The war-correspondent was about to enter the winding alley that formed a short "cut" between the Tower and the principal gateway of the park, passing, in its course, through the plantations which surrounded the mausoleum. He stopped; at the distant curve of the long drive had appeared a smart phaeton and pair—he recognised them as the favourite turn-out of Guy Vanbrugh.

"One moment, Stormont," said Paul Jerome. "Strange as it may seem to you, certain threads of the mystery with which we are dealing are in Vanbrugh's hands. I will, with your permission, ask him to join us in our investigation."

The explorer would have spoken, but Jerome was already hastening down the avenue towards the advancing phaeton. Guy Vanbrugh drew up and leant over to grasp the war-correspondent's hand. Their eyes met in silent comprehension, but, manlike, the one shrank as much from uttering as the other from hearing spoken sympathy.

"How are you, Jerome?" Observed Guy Vanbrugh, curtly. "I suppose my cousin is still at the Tower, I—I wanted to see her." He hesitated. "It—it was good of you to come up with her yesterday," he faltered. "I—I——"

He fingered his reins and stared down at them intently. Jerome suppressed a sigh.

"Vanbrugh," he said in a low tone, and drawing closer to the step of the phaeton, "I'm afraid I can't do as I should like and leave a horribly recent wound untouched. But the fact is, I think I—I ought to ask you some questions about—about poor Miss—Miss Davenal."

Guy Vanbrugh's features twitched at the sound of the name and he lifted his head almost haughtily.

"You will know more than anyone else about Miss Davenal's history and antecedents," pursued Jerome hurriedly, for Edward Stormont, following him, had all but gained the point where the phaeton had halted, "but if I am not wrong in certain audacious conclusions, she was not John Davenal's daughter, nor was her name Davenal."

The reins in Guy Vanbrugh's brown fingers were bent and twisted convulsively.

"I—I don't understand how you have come by the information, Jerome," he stammered, "or—forgive me—how the matter can concern you. But what you have said is no news to me. Miss Davenal—that is, Moira, was the soul of honour, all that she knew of herself I knew also. But it did not matter—I—I——"

He covered his face with a hollowed palm; he could not go on. Their conversation was otherwise interrupted; Edward Stormont had come up to them. The war-correspondent had turned to him.

"Stormont," he said, "I am in the curious position of knowing, or, at all events, of suspecting, the truth about a problem in which both Vanbrugh and yourself are more deeply, I am sorry to say, more tragically interested than I. Yet, as I have already suggested to you, we had better postpone explanations until I can be sure that I am not the victim of circumstantial evidence and a morbid imagination. Perhaps Vanbrugh will leave the phaeton to his man and join us."

Impressed by Jerome's air of quiet intelligence, Guy Vanbrugh gave the reins to the groom at his back, added a brief instruction, and descended. The war-correspondent took his arm, and the three, piloted by Jerome, walked down the leafy alley hard by.

"This morning, Vanbrugh," remarked the war-correspondent, as they went, "two fishermen brought to Stormont a piece of wet and rotting wood with a fragment of engraved metal—apparently part of a coffin-plate—attached to it. It had been cast ashore by last night's gale, and bore the name of Stormont, and two dates seventeen or eighteen years ago."

Guy Vanbrugh started. Paul Jerome noted the fact, but pressed his companion's arm arrestingly.

"Those dates," he proceeded, "Stormont recognised as the date on which his only child—a girl—was born, and that on which she died. The plate he also recognised as resembling that affixed to her coffin. We are now on our way to examine that coffin, Stormont supposing that an act of terrible desecration may have taken place. You will not wonder at my enlisting your co-operation when you learn that the name of the child, the name presumably missing from the broken plate, was Moira."

Guy Vanbrugh stood still, dazed alike by Paul Jerome's words, and by his apparent intimacy with more than one carefully guarded secret. Edward Stormont intervened, he was pale and excited.

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"This is hardly kind to me, Jerome," he said, "for Heaven's sake be explicit! Why do you speak to Guy of my dead child, what can he or you know of her, what can either of you have to do with the discovery of her broken coffin-plate in Groudle Bay?"

For answer the war-correspondent pointed across the open glade to which they had penetrated. Before them, its domed roof rising above the rim of the grassy hollow about it, was the mausoleum.

"There lies the explanation of the riddle," he responded. The explorer looked at him with concentrated brows, then glanced down at the great key which he still carried in his hand. It was old and intricate, but in good condition—the grease on its wards and barrel showed how it had been protected against the ravages of rust.

Paul Jerome pressed forward towards the steps that gave access to the hollow. Instinctively the others followed him—glancing covertly at each other. A moment more and Edward Stormont had turned the key in the lock of the heavy iron door. It swung back and the trio entered.

For the second time in his investigations the war-correspondent had had the forethought to pocket one of his bedroom candles. He produced and lit it. The gloomy, honeycombed interior of the vault became visible.

"Which is the compartment?" asked Paul Jerome gently of his elder companion.

Edward Stormont indicated one of the ranged recesses that was not far from the level of the ground. In its square aperture was perceptible the end of a leaden casket. On this latter was a plate, discoloured by age and the vapours of the place. It was inscribed—

MOIRA STORMONT
Aged 1 year and 7 months.
August 10, 1886.

The war-correspondent held the candle down and directed the explorer's attention to the inscription.

Edward Stormont shook his head.

"The plate was rather that from the shell within," he said; "we must lift the leaden casket out."

Guy Vanbrugh was studying the wording on the engraved metal with thoughtful, troubled eyes. Jerome touched him on the shoulder.

"You will help us, Vanbrugh?" he murmured. The younger man roused and assented. Together the three gripped the leaden receptacle, slid it from its recess, and set it on the granite floor. The war-correspondent noticed as they did so, that the massive lid was unsealed and loose.

Removing the candle from the ledge where he had temporarily deposited it, he brought it to the side of the casket, and extracting from a hip-pocket a many-bladed knife, he opened a short steel lever, and inserted it in the crack between lid and casket.

The leaden slab slipped up, and he lifted it off. An exclamation burst simultaneously from his own and the onlooker's lips. The casket was empty!

The explorer muttered a terrible anathema upon the authors of the sacrilege. But Paul Jerome checked him.

"Stormont," he said, "how if this does not mean what you imagine? How if it was not a dead but a living child of which this coffin was cheated?"

Edward Stormont cried out like a woman. "My child," he said, "my little Moira, alive, not dead. Great Heaven, that it could be so! But what—how——"

The war-correspondent shivered; there was an extravagance of joy in the explorer's face that was almost ecstasy.

"Alas, my poor friend!" he answered, "I cannot say that; would that I could. But if all be as I suspect—as I fear—here is one who can tell you of her as she grew to be, one who loved her, one who grieves for her even more than you can do now." And he drew forward Guy Vanbrugh.

In the flickering light of the candle Edward Stormont stood by the empty coffin and gazed incredulously at his nephew. Guy Vanbrugh put a shaking hand on the explorer's shoulder.

"I suppose it's true," he said unsteadily, "though I can scarcely figure it all out, or understand how Jerome got at it.

Twenty Minutes Late.

All the way from King's Cross we had been steadily losing time. The rails were wet and the train unusually heavy. At York we were twenty minutes late. There the railway people attached an additional engine and the train entered the Waverley Station, Edinburgh, that night on time. The principle is commonplace; when you cannot diminish an excessive load, increase the power. But what is an excessive load? Gently now. Wait a bit.

On any correct scale one hundred pounds is one hundred pounds, but on the back of a porter it is one thing and on the back of a slender girl quite another. To the first it is nothing to notice, to the second, it is crushing. In other words, weight is a question of what supports it.

This, then, is the principle on which we are to understand Mrs. Margaret Williams' assertion that she was *heavy* some years ago. No doubt the weighing machine would have showed her some pounds off her proper weight; for she was ill, out of sorts, and not eating anything to speak of. All the same, the lighter she *got* the heavier she *felt*; and when it comes to one's relation to one's own weight it is *feeling*, and not the scales, that settles the point.

For several years she dragged along in this unsatisfactory way; always weary and fatigued, as if from hard and continuous labour, when, in fact, she was doing scarcely any work at all. Indeed, her weakness was so great she could hardly get about.

If Mrs. Williams could have eaten heartily and digested her food well, it might be thought she would have recovered. But it was precisely because she could *not* do so that the illness came upon her. In other words she was suffering from chronic indigestion and its consequences. Let her tell her own story. Writing from her home, 8, Brook Street, Taibach, near Port Talbot, on January 24th, 1903, she says: "I could not digest the food I took, and in consequence it lay like lead on my chest, causing me excruciating pain round the heart and between the shoulders, often followed by vomiting.

"I varied my diet, ceased to take solids and lived on bread and milk, but all to no purpose. Loss of sleep, splitting headaches, and flatulency added to my sufferings."

The usual means of relief having been tried in vain, Mrs. Williams resorted to Mother Siegel's Syrup, with what result she shall state herself: "After the first two bottles," she declares, "I felt somewhat better, but a marked change took place after I had taken the third bottle. I could then eat without vomiting or experiencing any pain, felt my food was nourishing me, regained strength, and in a short time was quite cured and have never suffered from indigestion since."

Truly, no matter what the scales may affirm as to one's weight, one never feels encumbered by it so long as plenty of well-digested food furnishes the power and strength which should fill it from head to heel. When digestion *fails*, the remedy—as shown in numberless instances—is the same that restored again to Mrs. Williams the vigour of health.

Eloquence and Dyspepsia.

A keen observer of human life declares that all good after-dinner speakers are dyspeptics. The vital force which is required by the digestive apparatus in the performance of its functions is, he asserts, used up by the brain, at the expense of the stomach, liver and kidneys, which are thus robbed of their power to digest and assimilate food. When digestion fails, whether from overwork, loss of tone, or errors of diet, the surest remedy—as has been proved in thousands of cases—is Mother Seigel's Syrup. It completely cured Mr. Wm. Taylor, 15, Hanover Street, Haverstock Hill, London, of acute indigestion and debility. He still takes it occasionally, for he says: "I find it aids my digestion and regulates the system."

SERIAL STORY.

But Moira told me recently that she wasn't Moira Davenal—John Davenal had just confessed it, on what narrowly escaped being his death-bed. A while before he had brought up, when working on my yacht in the bay, part of an inscribed plate with the name 'Moira' on it, and the words 'Born' and 'Died.' It was the other half, no doubt, of the one brought to you. The coffin from which the plate came must have been thrown into the bay."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the explorer, for the speaker had paused wearily.

"What is the use of trying to fathom it all now?" continued Guy Vanbrugh, the depression of a profound melancholy betraying itself in his tones. "It won't give her back to me. Davenal was too ill to tell her any more, and after that the nurses wouldn't let them talk. We were going to ask him about it when he got well; we were going to do a great many things then."

Edward Stormont gripped the hand that lay on his shoulder.

"Then," he cried; "why do you say 'then' and 'now' like that? If my child was not dead and not buried, and if she grew up, why, as Jerome says, do you not take me to her? Who is Davenal, and why should she be passed off as his child? She is mine, and I will see her righted. I can guess why she was made to die this sham death, she stood between wealth and a selfish woman, whom I was fool enough to trust. Fool, triple fool, that I was."

The explorer was speaking excitedly and at random, like a man in a trance.

Paul Jerome stepped a pace or two nearer.

"John Davenal," he said, "and Hannah Davenal, your sister-in-law's maid, were brother and sister. He is a widower, and has passed as having one daughter, a girl of eighteen or nineteen, named Moira. Vanbrugh saw her and loved her, they were even, with a certain romantic secrecy, betrothed. A series of significant incidents, not easy to set out coherently, suggest that she may have been your daughter. Unhappily she was drowned yesterday in Groudle Bay."

Edward Stormont groaned, and his hands closed with a nervous tenderness over those of Guy Vanbrugh.

"My boy," he said, "my poor boy!"

Paul Jerome heard a sob from the throat of the younger man and slipped away, leaving the two alone together.

Gliding out of the small, heavy portal into the fresh, bright morning, he moved to clear the line of sight from the entrance. The grief of the two at once so strangely bereaved and so strangely brought together did not permit even of the neighbourhood of a third.

As he lingered, scanning idly the not unpicturesque vistas presented by the glade and the plantations, he heard his own name called in a familiar voice, and facing about, beheld, mounted upon the verge of the hollow in which he himself was lounging, the tall form of Mr. Ussher. With him was another person, a woman.

Paul Jerome gasped and stared, and stared and gasped again. There was no mistaking the shy yet proud features, the blue eyes, the red-gold tresses, the delicately-poised, almost classic head. They were those of the girl he had seen in the diving dress in Groudle Bay, the girl who was Guy Vanbrugh's betrothed, the girl whom they had believed drowned.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

"Oh, Sir, my Lady!"

"This is Mr. Jerome, Miss Davenal, the gentleman of whom I have been speaking. No doubt he will be able to tell us if Sir Guy has called at the Tower this morning."

With these calmly uttered words the detective introduced his companion to the war-correspondent. Paul Jerome had leapt across the hollow and sprung upon its edge at the point where Mr. Ussher and Moira were standing. The latter bowed shyly, and Jerome saw that she was not only pretty, but well-bred, and did not wonder at the whole-hearted enthusiasm which had prompted Guy Vanbrugh to offer the diver's supposed daughter his name and hand in marriage. He bowed in return.

"I am delighted," he began, "to see you safe and sound, Miss——" He paused over the next word, but gave her her usual surname—"Miss Davenal," he said. "We feared that you were no longer to be numbered with the living. The——the accident——"

Again he paused, and looked at Mr. Ussher. The detective blushed.

"You are right, sir," he remarked, nervously. "Miss Davenal's account of the affair—as completed under a little cross-examination, for the young lady is most discreet and far from vindictive—bears out your view. Hartigan decoyed her into the boat upon some pretext, upset it, as she thought by accident. But once in the water and finding that she could swim, he tried deliberately to thrust her under, saying that he 'would do for her this time.'"

"Great Heaven!" ejaculated the war-correspondent, glancing at the shy, slight heroine of this terrifying experience.

"Miss Davenal," went on the detective, "escaped by diving, and was carried out by the current as far as Groudle Island. The lighthouse men there knew her and gave her shelter for the night—the gale prevented her return till this morning."

"Groudle Island!" cried Jerome; "why, that is three miles out."

Moira smiled involuntarily at his surprise. "I am one of the best swimmers in all Groudle," she said; "father taught me."

The word she had used so instinctively in speaking of the diver recalled the war-correspondent to a sense of the situation.

"Miss—Miss Davenal," he observed; "you will pardon my seeming presumption when I say that I am aware of your engagement to Sir Guy Vanbrugh."

He glanced over his shoulder at the mausoleum. The explorer and the baronet still lingered in the shadowy place.

"You are well informed, sir," commented the detective, ruefully; "however, I myself gathered yesterday that, as it was reported in the village, Sir Guy Vanbrugh had been paying Miss Davenal—begging her pardon—considerable attention. This morning I went up to make some tentative investigations—for I will confess, sir, that your view of Hartigan's proceedings rather haunted me. Judge of my amazement, sir, when at the Close I met Miss Davenal herself, anxious, as I ventured to conclude, to reassure Sir Guy, should he have heard of her supposed death. The servants said he had driven over here and we came across together."

Paul Jerome stepped down into the hollow at their feet. "A moment," he said, and, without further parley, strode to the mausoleum door. For the first time Mr. Ussher perceived that it was open and a new thrill of bewildered curiosity seized him.

The war-correspondent was looking into the gloomy interior of the granite pile. Edward Stormont stood with bent head and folded arms, Guy Vanbrugh, plucking restlessly at his driving gloves, was talking to him in low, broken sentences. Mastering imperfectly his own emotion, he was speaking of Moira, of her beauty, of her housewifely ways, of her frank yet proud simplicity.

Jerome went out of the sunshine into the shadow that surrounded the two men, and confronted them suddenly.

"Guy," he said, "Stormont—you are not women to start or faint at a piece of strange, good news. It is not the first time by many, and it will not be the last by many more, that the sea has given up its fancied prey—alive."

Guy Vanbrugh tottered like a drunken man and clutched at the war-correspondent's arm.

"Jerome," he gasped, "old fellow, you don't mean—Moira?"

"Yes, I do," he was answered heartily. "She reached Groudle Island in safety, carried thither by the current. The gale detained her at the lighthouse station there, and she only landed at Groudle this morning. She is outside now."

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The baronet broke from him, and darted into the open. Paul Jerome turned to Edward Stormont.

"Fate has given happiness back to Vanbrugh," he said; "let us hope that it has also given you back a daughter. But as yet she knows nothing of you. Be patient for a little. Vanbrugh must have suffered terribly in the last few hours."

The explorer drew a long breath and was silent, studying the empty leaden casket beside him.

The war-correspondent touched his arm.

"She is a lovely creature," he added. "Time promises to pay you a lavish interest on his debt. Will you not steal a glimpse of her unawares? It may be that some fortunate resemblance will confirm our apparently fantastic suppositions. She does not favour you except in the colour of her eyes. Her hair is a wonderful red-gold."

Edward Stormont started from his peculiar stupor. Jerome's last sentence had pierced it. He sprang to the door of the mausoleum. Near it stood Guy Vanbrugh and his betrothed—the fair head and the brown one very close together. Further off, contemplating the tree-tops with a great show of interest, was Mr. Ussher.

The explorer's gaze fastened hungrily upon the unconscious girl and his hands went out slowly, quiveringly. It was as if some irresistible attraction were drawing him to her.

"How like!" he muttered—and there was a yearning sob in his deep voice; "how very like—*her!*"

The sob rose to a piercing cry. Moira had turned—Guy Vanbrugh was pointing to the figure of the explorer. She made a step in the direction of Edward Stormont. But the explorer was already at her side. Tremblingly he took her face in his hands, poring upon it with a pathetic intensity.

But the cry he had uttered at the sight of her features had been eloquent of the conviction they had brought him. There was stamped upon them, plain for him to read, in a trick of lips and brows and eyes as they smiled up at him in a wistful sympthy, the likeness—the soul's likeness—of the only woman he had ever loved.

He forgot, in a flash, the as yet incomplete chain of proof, the amazing nature of the involved problems, the extravagance of the view that he was accepting, and, with an inarticulate exclamation of love and pity, folded her in his arms.

Moira had not wept on her lover's breast, but, some strange new emotion overcoming her, she laid her head on Edward Stormont's shoulder, and burst into tears.

Jerome shot a glance of satisfaction and significance at Guy Vanbrugh, and, passing the three, joined Mr. Ussher. The detective had faced about and was regarding this latest development of the situation with ludicrous perplexity.

"Well," asked the war-correspondent, "and what about Hartigan now?"

A ruddy glow overspread the other's countenance. "You have wiped my eyes a second time, sir," he said, "and what is worse, our bird is flown. I called at the Half Brick on my way here with Miss Davenal, meaning to clap the darbies on the fellow, but he had left—for foreign parts, he told the landlord."

"That won't do," answered Jerome, thoughtfully, "we must have him—for many reasons we must have him."

"Quite so, sir," agreed the detective; "I did send down an ostler to the depot with a description of him to be circulated. This will be done immediately. But my instinct led me to follow up Sir Guy's association with Miss Davenal, and besides, I wished to see you."

Mr. Ussher bent to the war-correspondent's ear.

"Excuse me, sir," he pursued, "but I fancy I don't yet know all that you do. What did Hartigan want to kill Miss Davenal for—she herself apparently can't tell. And what is she to Mr. Stormont?—something more than ordinary, by what we have just seen. And why do I find all you gentlemen in this particular neighbourhood, with that queer burial place open. What is going on?"

Jerome hesitated. "I am not sure," he replied, "that I ought to answer any of those questions before consulting Stormont himself. I had better do so at once."

(*Continued overleaf.*)

Curious Effect of a Crust of Bread.

A curious effect of a crust of bread is communicated by Mrs. Frances Butterfield, of Albert Cottages, Victoria Road, Mexboro, a woman who has been restored to health by Bile Beans after suffering forty years from indigestion and biliousness. She says: "When I saw a piece of breadcrust it had a most peculiar effect. It would suggest the sticking of food at the chest. A feeling of dryness, and by degrees a sharp cutting pain would come on. I had had indigestion from being a girl, and frequent bilious attacks. I should vomit green bile one day, and be so bad that for two or three days afterwards I could do no work. An acute pain at the chest and through the shoulders was an unfailing sign that another attack of indigestion was due, and then I should be prostrated for a few days. It was terrible! Often I was so weak and dizzy that I reeled if I stooped to pick up anything or made the slightest strain in doing what I was engaged upon. My husband used to look at me sometimes and say "You look like death." Sometimes I should be burning hot one minute and chill as ice the next, and these alternate hot and cold sensations would occasionally keep me awake all night. The doctor I consulted didn't seem to be able to give me any relief. I can safely say I have swallowed hundreds of bottles of medicine and boxes of different pills, but still I went on ailing just the same, until just over fifteen months ago. At that time I was very bad, and on the advice of a friend I tried a box of Bile Beans. It did me good, and I got another. Just by what stages they acted upon me I can't now say, but within a few weeks after beginning with Bile Beans I found they were curing me. I persevered with them, and within three months they had cured me completely. For forty long years I had never been free from indigestion and biliousness for longer than a few days. It is now twelve months since Bile Beans cured me, and during the whole of that time I have never had a trace of either complaint. This leaves no mistake about the permanency of my cure. I have recommended Bile Beans to scores of people, and I shall continue to recommend them."

The above facts have been embodied in a sworn statement made by Mrs. Butterfield before a Commissioner for Oaths. Mrs. Butterfield is the mother of seven children, and one of her grown-up sons was amongst the miners affected by the recent strike at the Denaby and Cadeby Collieries, in connection with which so many families were evicted.

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He made his way back to the explorer, taking from his pocket, as he went, the fragment of jewelled tortoiseshell.

"Pardon me, Stormont," he said, when he had gained the little group hard by, "but one matter presses. The worthy Mr. Ussher represents the law, and, as this young lady will tell you, the death from which she has escaped so narrowly was not an accident but an attempted murder."

Edward Stormont recoiled. "Murder!" he repeated, and Guy Vanbrugh echoed his exclamation.

"Yes," said Jerome; "Hartigan, the husband of Lady Tarleton's late maid, Hannah Davenal, and the man originally suspected, as you know, of compassing that singular person's death, tried to drown her—in fact, believed he had done so."

"Davenal's husband!" muttered the explorer, "so! Villainy never lacks choice of instruments. I remember now, both man and woman had true gallows-faces."

Jerome held out his hand with the broken pin in it. He saw that Edward Stormont's thoughts were running in the same channel as his own.

"You recollect the day when you were so angry at finding the mausoleum open," he remarked, "and my brushing the threshold for the door to close. I picked this up there, and kept it, by an odd chance."

The explorer took the piece of jewelled tortoiseshell. "What is this?" he demanded.

"You will recollect also," continued the war-correspondent, momentarily ignoring the question, "a gamekeeper of yours confessing to Ussher that he believed he had seen, late on a particular evening—or rather in the small hours of the following morning—a certain person passing near this spot and accompanied by Hannah Davenal?"

"Yes," answered Edward Stormont, with some attention.

"This pin," proceeded Jerome, gravely, "has been recognised as being one of a valuable set given by her daughter to——"

Edward Stormont interrupted him hastily. "But the matter with which we are now dealing," he said, "took place sixteen or seventeen years ago. Why should she have revisited the—the scene so recently."

Paul Jerome shook his head. "That is part of the mystery," he responded; "the mystery to which the death of Hannah Davenal belongs."

The explorer frowned, then put Moira's arm in his own, and moved off. "Bring Ussher with you," he said; "the fellow may be needed. Once for all we will fathom the whole scoundrelly business."

Guy Vanbrugh went forward with his kinsman and his betrothed. The war-correspondent only stayed to summon the detective. There was a trifle of reluctance, even of anxiety, in his bearing. But he, too, strode with his companion across the glade and made for the Tower. By the time he had evaded half a dozen of the detective's questions, they had caught up with Moira and her escort, and all five entered the Tower together.

Edward Stormont led the way to his library and laid his hand upon the knob of the door. It resisted. He had forgotten that Irene had been left to the protection of its stout lock and thick panels. Jerome tapped and called cheerily to the occupant of the room. The lock clicked within, the latch whined, and the opening door revealed the captive.

When she saw Moira she started forward with a glad cry. Too practical for superstitious alarm, she had guessed the truth instantaneously.

"Oh, my dear!" she exclaimed, "so you didn't get drowned after all. You can't tell how glad I am. But what *has* been happening that you come here with—with Sir Guy and Uncle Edward?"

She stopped, catching a significant glance from her lover. Edward Stormont had passed her almost roughly into the library, put Moira into a chair, and rang the bell. Guy Vanbrugh followed, not without a covert squeeze of Irene's hand, and took up his position by Moira, while Mr. Ussher, slipping modestly into the apartment, retreated to a convenient corner.

Irene watched these proceedings with acute interest; Paul Jerome had lingered in the middle of the room, the troubled, doubtful expression still hanging about his usually resolute features. A look of anxious pity crossed them suddenly, and he drew nearer to Irene. A servant, answering the imperious peal of the bell, had entered the library.

"Ask her ladyship," said Edward Stormont harshly, "if she will be good enough to come down to the library. And Jerome," he added, "perhaps Irene will take your word and mine that she will save herself and us pain by withdrawing."

Irene coloured—her uncle's tone was almost insulting.

Jerome whispered to her.

"Forgive him, dear," murmured the war-correspondent; "he has had a great shock—he is not himself. Let us slip out together. I am afraid there is going to be a trying scene."

"How strange," said Irene, in the same guarded tone; "about us? Then why is Miss Davenal here, and Guy?"

The war-correspondent did not reply, but drew her gently from the room. They did not cross the threshold—the footman, returning, with extraordinary speed, from his mission, burst into the apartment. But it was not to precede and announce Lady Tarleton, the man's face was white and his eyes starting.

"Oh, sir," he gasped, "my lady!"

The explorer glanced, but once, at the man's tell-tale visage, then rose and dashed from the room.

(To be concluded next week.)

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A Popular Medical Journal on Deafness.

The April "Review of Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases" takes up the question of the lately reported increase in the percentage of deaf people. In the opinion of the Editor, the public knowledge of defective hearing and its causes must be developed, and to this end the present issue of the "Review" gives plainly worded instructions for testing the hearing, and a series of popular articles on "Prevention and Cure of Deafness." As this number of the "Review" is intended for public benefit, those who are interested in the subject can obtain a free copy by addressing the Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. Another special feature of the "Review" is the enclosure of a Patient's Report Form, for the benefit of those who wish advice, for which no fee is charged, if given by correspondence. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultation.

IMPORTANT TO WOMEN.

A WONDERFUL BEAUTIFIER.

A short time since our readers were informed about that wonderful preparation for the complexion, Peralia, and strongly advised to try it for blackheads, acne, wrinkles, crow's feet, pimples, &c. Now listen to what a recent user has got to say about it: "In reply to your kind letter, I have taken your advice and have procured a bottle of Henderson's Peralia from Boot's Drug Stores. Well! I must say I was astonished at the result. I have spent large amounts on so-called remedies, but with indifferent success; but one bottle of Peralia entirely removed the scurvy from which I was suffering from my face, and the unnatural redness from my nose. I am now using it on my hands and arms, which it has made lovely and white, and also find it excellent for chapped hands. I am in a large milliner's shop, and all the girls in our establishment use Peralia, and think it is lovely.—Yours faithfully, Ada Fleming, Station Street, Nottingham." That ought to be a sufficient testimonial for any reader, and we hope any of them that are suffering from such disfiguring humours will act on our advice, and at once give Peralia a trial. The Peralia Company is a very enterprising firm, and they are now making a present of a dainty little book, called "Beauty's Boudoir," to every purchaser of Peralia who asks for it. We are of the opinion that none of our lady readers should be without it. By the way, the prices of Peralia, post free, in plain wrapper, are 1s. 3d., 1s. 9d., and 2s. 9d.

Many of our readers, we are sure, would like to know of a really reliable hair curler. When we say reliable, we mean one that is not affected by rain, or the heat of a ballroom. To those who are interested, and are anxious to possess neat, curly locks, we recommend "Crimpoline." It is nothing short of marvellous the manner in which this fluid sets about its business. All you have got to do is simply to apply a little to your hair for a few nights and you soon become the owner of lovely wavy ringlets. No! you need no tongs, pins nor curlers. Sounds almost to good to be true, doesn't it? Well, try it and see for yourself. Several who have used it tell us that once you get the hair properly in curl with it, you need only use it once in the week. Its price is so very moderate, too, that none of our readers need be hindered from sending for it on that account. If you write to the proprietors, enclosing 2s. or 2s. 9d., either in stamps, or a postal order, they will send you a bottle, post free, and secretly packed. Their address is the Peralia Perfumery Co., Dept. 14, Camden Street, North Shields.

FOR SMART WOMEN

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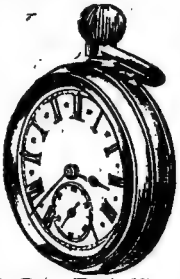

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She'd Like it Then.

He: "Would you like to hear me sing 'In the Sweet By-and-Bye,' Miss Mattie?" She (sweetly): "Yes, Henry, but not before."

A Splendid Compliment.

She: "Yes, my little girl is a beautiful child. People say she took her beauty from me." He (gallantly): "I can't say that I noticed your loss."

His Love Wasn't Blind.

He: "Stop! We can't sit down here; this is wet paint." She (tearfully): "I fear you don't love me blindly. If you did you would never have seen the paint."

Hurt His Feelings.

She: "I think Mr. Rymer, the minor poet, felt hurt at a remark you made the other night." He: "What did I say?" She: "You said there was only one Shakespeare."

It Would Save Curling Tongs.

"Cartoon has written a story that'll make your hair curl," said Mawson. "Get it for me, for goodness' sake!" said Mrs. M. "It'll save me from burning my fingers off with the tongs."

His Looks Would Tell.

Mr. Gotlots: "Do you really love my daughter, or do you only think you love her?" Percy Mushly (rapturously): "Oh, Mr. Gotlots! Can't you tell by my looks that there is no thinking about it?"

Showing Her Hatred.

"I thought, Miss S., that you hated that flirty minx; yet you went up and kissed her." "So I do hate her, and that is why I did it. Look at the big freckles on her chin where I kissed the powder off."

The Value of an Honoured Name.

"Young man," said the young woman's father, "you have boasted several times that you possess an honoured name." "Yes, sir," replied the foreign suitor, haughtily. "Well, may I inquire what bank it will be honoured at, and for how much?"

A Relic of War.

Jones (looking over friend's collection of curios): "Ah, and where did you say this cannon ball was from? A relic of some celebrated field of battle, I suppose?" Married Friend: "Yes, it *is* a relic of a field of battle—one between my wife and me last Christmas. It is her first Christmas pudding."

Such a Good Man!

"George," she said in a low voice, "would you make a great sacrifice for my happiness?" "Certainly," he replied. "Would you give up smoking for my sake?" "Give up smoking for your sake?" he repeated. Then after a silence he exclaimed hoarsely, "I can refuse you nothing. I will give up smoking for your sake. Hereafter when I smoke it will be for my own sake."

An Animal Proposal.

She: "You looked so sheepish when you proposed to me." He: "And you looked so wolfish when you accepted me."

Closed Eyes Needed.

"She sings with a great deal of expression, doesn't she?" "Yes, she does; but it's the kind that you must close your eyes to appreciate."

Only a Hint Dropping.

Maud (who lives next door): "What was that terrible noise I heard about twelve o'clock last night?" Mabel: "Papa dropped a hint for Charlie to go."

No Need to Prosecute.

Judge: "You say you do not wish to prosecute this defendant for stealing a kiss?" Fair Complainant: "No, your honour. The property has been restored."

The Employer's Reply.

"When I asked for a rise I told my employer I had grown grey in his service." "What did he say?" "He said if I had worked anywhere else I probably would have got bald."

Changed the Name.

"And so my little wife cooked all this herself. What does she call it?" "Well, I intended it for bread; but after it came out of the oven I concluded I'd better put sauce on it and call it pudding."

A Valuable Thumb.

Mrs. Wickwire: "The idea! Here is a story in the paper about a woman suing for £2,000 for the loss of only a thumb." Mr. Wickwire: "Perhaps it was the thumb she kept her husband under."

No Longer Engaged.

Afternoon Caller: "Is Miss Lippitt disengaged?" Nanette: "I'm afraid so, ma'am. I just see her young man hurry down th' front steps with the diamond ring she's been wearing since April."

Was It Intended?

Ella: "Pa says we can't marry for ten years. But don't look so sad, George; you are yet young." George: "Yes, I know I am, dearest. I wasn't thinking of myself, but of you, love." It was at once put off indefinitely.

Dressed to Kill!

Clara: "Now, I'm all ready for the ball. How do I look, Jack?" Jack: "You remind me of a Dervish in his war dress." Clara: "Oh, you nasty thing! I—I——" Jack: "Don't cry, darling! I simply meant you were dressed to kill."

She Hadn't Done So Yet.

"You've kissed that young Jones good-night and let him go, haven't you, Stella?" said a weary voice at the top of the stairs. There was an awful silence for a moment, and then in a timid, hesitating voice the young man in the darkened hall below responded: "No, ma'am, but I—I think she's going to."

Taking Strong Measures.

The modern woman is developing physically as well as intellectually. A powerful-looking damsel was heard the other day to complain of an insult offered to her by a yokel while she was taking a country ramble. "What did he do to you?" asked a sympathetic friend. "Chucked me under the chin." "And what did you do?" "Chucked him over the fence."

He Lost the Bet.

"Then it can never be?" he gasped, as he rose like a man in a dream. "No," she murmured, in a low but decided voice; "I am sorry, Mr. Poppledick, but it can never be. It is impossible." "Grant me, then," he said hoarsely, passing his hand across his blinded eyes, "one last request." She extended her hand in silence. "Let me," he said, in a low voice, "have half-a-crown until to-morrow night. I've got a bet on this, and I've lost, and the fellows are waiting patiently round the corner for me to treat them."

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.]

A Troubled Iceberg.

"CORAL."—Your letter is most interesting. You fear you could never love, as your temperament is too cold. Yet you have had very many suitors, who have been devoted to you, and whom you have wished to love. I know girls of your type, and think they often make very good friends for men.

* * * * *

Wait till you meet the man whom you *like* better than any others, and should he propose marriage, act on your own judgment as to accepting him. The "good fellowship" match is often a happy one—especially as you appear to have "Bohemian" ideas. But don't forget that actors' professions of love are often meaningless. They are too used to making them on the stage.

❦❦❦

Love versus Family.

"GLOW WORM" is twenty-six. When he was eighteen he had to suddenly earn his own living, and took a place in a large shop. He has now met a girl who is a tradesman's daughter, but quite uneducated. "GLOW WORM" tells me he comes of a noble family, and that they would disown him if he married the girl. As they love each other, do I advise "GLOW WORM" to marry?

* * * * *

Well, "GLOW WORM," if your noble family have not been able to do anything better for you than they seem to have done, it would not seem to matter very much how they regarded your marriage. Marry the girl you love, and ignore your relations. As you are in for a business career, you had far better marry a girl in the same sphere than be dragged at the heels of somebody you do not love who is higher up socially.

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Lover or Parent?

"E. A. C." is a lover, and also a good Samaritan to his sweetheart's parent, who is in a business which has fallen on evil days. "E. A. C." has been spending all his ready money in helping them, but the girl has written asking him to discontinue his attentions until things are financially brighter. Should he do this, or would it be better for him to insist on continuing his help?

* * * * *

If you feel that your help is really vital to them don't listen to their requests for you to cease it. That may be mere pride, and ought not to stand in the way of a really good action. If, however, things are really getting smoother with them, and the girl wishes to help her parent in the business, it would be perhaps better for you not to press your claims on her at present. The girl has to choose between helping her family and marrying, and has quite rightly given the first claim prior place. You, on your part, should be disposed to agree to this, at any rate until things improve.

Won't Raise his Hat.

"MARY" is in sad trouble. She recently met "ARTHUR," to whom she took a great fancy. This she told her friends. Now, "ARTHUR," though a very nice boy, has the very slightest knowledge of good manners. Whenever "MARY" meets him she bows very nicely, but "ARTHUR" never raises his hat. This has gone on for such a long time that "MARY" asks my advice as to how to convey to "ARTHUR" his proper duty when meeting a lady.

* * * * *

Let "MARY" go out with her brother, or cousin, or male friend, and when next they meet "ARTHUR," and she recognises him, let her request her escort to raise his hat in a very conspicuous way. If "ARTHUR" does not see from example what is the proper thing to do, then he must be lacking in intelligence as well as knowledge of good breeding, and would scarcely be a nice man for "MARY" to wish to cultivate.

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One-sided Love.

"PERPLEXED" has been keeping company with a young lady for eighteen months, and is very much in love with her. When he proposed, she told him she did not like him better than any other man she knew, and did not think she could love anybody, as she did not experience the tender emotions. "PERPLEXED" proposed again, and got the same answer. The girl said she did not see why two people like themselves should not be happy.

* * * * *

I quite agree with the girl. There are very many people in the world like her, but not so outspoken. The average girl would have pretended to feel all sorts of things for you that she did not, and when she undeceived you would have done so in a way that might have broken your heart.

* * * * *

I do not see why, if she feels that she likes your society and respects your good qualities, and does not love anybody better than yourself, you should not drop all talk about love, and decide to go through life together, trusting that affection will follow, as it probably will. I have known many marriages in which the love has been one-sided, and yet the couples have been among the happiest.

❦❦❦

A Flirt's Fancy.

"FLIRT" is twenty, and has been what her pen name suggests, but she has now decided that a gentleman twenty years older than herself and rather above her socially is her ideal, and the only man she could ever love. She has only known him two months, when she terminated her friendship with him, as she knew her parents would never consent to it. Now she is two hundred miles away from him, and longs to see him again.

* * * * *

Such attachments are very dangerous. Very often girls of your age meet what they think to be their ideal men in those much older than themselves. Generally they are wrong. Men of that age are often only too prone to trifle with the affections of young girls. They are usually very skilled in the arts of flattery and courtship, and their conversation is generally far more interesting than that of their juniors. This accounts for their fascination for certain girls. But these men are very rarely sincere. Probably what they say to one girl is precisely the same as to others. I have seen too many cases of that sort of thing in men of mature age.

* * * * *

I should really try to forget him—unless, of course, he proves, by constant attentions to you, that he has serious intentions. But marriage is very much a lottery when the husband has twenty years' start of the girl. You must remember the time, ten or fifteen years hence, when you will still be a young woman, but your husband will be long past his prime.

Cynthia

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